*The*
# ENGLISH HOME

*Celebrating the essence of English style*

August 2015 | Issue 126 | £4.10 | UK Edition



## *Dream Bedrooms*

Design inspiration for the perfect sanctuary

**England's most desirable villages**

**HOMES WITH CHARACTER**

From Cornish farmhouse to townhouse retreat

## STYLE SECRETS

*Nicky Haslam, Joanna Wood, Atlanta Bartlett & Sasha Schwerdt on achieving informal yet elegant schemes*





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**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP** Discover the secrets of relaxed decor from three design experts, on page 96.

Choose subtle exterior details to create a smart welcome, on page 74.

Add warmth and character to kitchens with classic country style, on page 102.



## WE LOVE...

The combination of our Chichester dresser in Blakeney Blue, with our Harrogate table in Lily and chairs painted in Charcoal

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NEPTUNE

# A letter from home



## Behind the scenes

*This month I have been.....*

• Falling in love with fabric for a Roman blind: two metres of the exquisite Longleat weave by de Le Cuona has just arrived. • Marvelling at the fit of the double bow-fronted chest of drawers now sitting in a large alcove in my bedroom. It was made-to-measure by Scumble Goosie with the ingenious bonus of being able to be split into two pieces to negotiate a tight turn in my staircase. • Stumbling upon a neat Edwardian wooden sofa in a junk shop for a ridiculous price of £85. Antique joy for less than an Ikea buy.



Looking at life through rose-tinted spectacles is usually an analogy for dreamers who drift through life in a haze. But, as someone who deliberately likes to wear these metaphorical glasses from time to time, I think the stereotype is rather short-sighted. Yes, a healthy dose of realism is vital, but I am sure many of you agree that it is essential for one's sanity to seek out, magnify and squeeze every ounce of enjoyment from the uplifting things in life.

The one place we can truly set the scene to do this is within our own homes and gardens – be it dressing a room with meaningful pieces, or stopping to smell the roses. So in this issue we have taken an unashamedly romantic focus by looking at subtle ways to add prettiness to interiors and finding the most beautiful buys for bedrooms to help you create your ultimate personal sanctuary. For those for whom living the dream may require a new home location, we have also thoroughly enjoyed investigating which villages around England are currently deemed to be the most alluring and desirable as home locations by those in the know.

I find myself most transported by the piece entitled Summer Pursuits. The English have become practised at making the most of intermittent sunshine, and sometimes just picturing what you will do, given a run of lovely days, can be as uplifting as actually doing it. Or is that just me? Then again, I have to confess that sometimes when poring over a delicious picture-rich cookery book, or reading reviews of beautiful hotels, I can almost taste the recipe I am salivating over, or feel as though I have temporarily taken a holiday from my armchair...

I do hope you find plenty of practical application in this issue, but I also hope that we manage to transport you a little, too.

With warmest regards,



Kerryn Harper-Cuss, Editor

EDITOR'S PHOTOGRAPH RACHEL SMITH ROSE PHOTOGRAPH SARAH GARDNER



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# The ENGLISH HOME




COVER IMAGE
BEDROOM CREATED BY
TURNER POCOCK
WALLPAPER BY DE GOURNAY

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**Mixed compilation**
The Dorchester fabric collection from Prestigious Textiles is an updated version of 'shabby chic' style in a series of subtle tones. In this room, jacquard curtains in a gentle violet hue introduce a relaxed foil to the smart contemporary wall light (try Hector Finch for similar fittings) and classic herringbone floor. *Dorchester Collection Wimborne fabric, in Mulberry, £32.99 a metre, Prestigious Textiles*

# HOME *Comforts*

*Bring touches of colour and texture into your home this summer with a choice selection of tempting buys from our round up of new collections*

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

**Upon reflection**
A distressed-edged mirror creates synergy with classic furnishings. This example is made from faux antiqued glass with small black dots and uneven edges, and the bronze frame has a distressed finish. As the mirror projects from the wall it is ideal to pair with hanging plates or three-dimensional artwork.
*Versailles mirror, large, £395, Oka*

**Swing into sunset**
Climb into this large hammock and enjoy a lazy afternoon. The design has cotton fabric sides for added comfort and to provide better upper-back support, just in case one happens to snooze for a bit.
*Sunset hammock, £79, Hen and Hammock*

**Cover up**
For al fresco dining or a summer picnic, it is nice to enjoy food at a leisurely pace, hence, you may need to cover dishes to keep the bugs at bay. Try this wicker platter, which, at 47cm wide, is big enough to cover a large plate.
*Wicker serving platter and cover, £25, An Angel at my Table*

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

**White appeal**
Inspired by a trip to Provence, each of these textured mats is uniquely made from recycled materials. The long runner is especially useful as a luxurious floor cover in front of the bath.
*Toulon bath mats, white, from £16, The White Company*

**Fresh designs**
Artist Lottie Day makes a wide variety of hand-printed textile products from deck chairs to lampshades and tea towels. Each illustration exudes brightly detailed motifs inspired by nature.
*Tea towels, £12 each, Lottie Day*

**Relaxed mood**
A blue pattern on a natural linen fabric has a softer aesthetic than when applied to a stark white background. Consequently, this combination works well in a casual country style interior, fitting in seamlessly with the natural materials and gentle tones often adopted in country schemes.
*Whitewood fabric, £49.90 a metre, Linwood*

**Broad stripes**
With its wide stripes, this runner has a contemporary feel, yet its blue tones underline a classic mood. It looks particularly smart with dark-wood flooring.
*Fitzroy black, £118 a metre, Roger Oates*









CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

**Green light**
For rooms where a glamorous light shade or an ornate chandelier would not suit the decor, add interest instead with a simple colourful pendant. Handmade from recycled glass, the translucent green will glisten best in a room flooded with natural light.
*Green glass pendant light and three metres of black fabric cable, £39.95, ceiling rose not included, Grace & Glory*

**New direction**
This wallpaper is a clever blend of old and new; the print is based on the idea of a traditional crewel pattern, but with a vibrant background the falling leaves have a modern feel. Note how well the pattern's large scale works next to a sizable fixture, such as this free-standing bath.
*Jewel leaves, cadmium/dove, £36 a roll, Sanderson*

**Picturesque setting**
An outdoor office or hobby room is ideal if there is a lack of space inside the house and creates a space for quiet contemplation.
*Crane round pavilion Summerhouse, £7,395, John Lewis*



FEATURE SUZANNA BALL

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ENGLAND

# COMING UP ROSES

Elegant buys inspired by the quintessentially English bloom

1



2



3



4



5





8

6




7



**1 BEST DRESSED** *Fuchsia rose Irish linen damask tablecloth/throw, £164.50, English Abode* **2 CRYSTAL CLEAR** *Handmade Karen rose bowl, £125, William Yeoward* **3 PARISIAN ELITE** *Une Rose Parmi les Roses print, £65, John Lewis* **4 FADED CHARM** *Summer Roses (faded on oyster) fabric (67 per cent Linen, 28 per cent cotton, 5 per cent Polyamide), £197 a metre, Bennison Fabrics* **5 HEART OF ROMANCE** *Rose glass heart by John Derian, £75, Liberty* **6 BAKE ME A CAKE** *Rose petals for puddings, cakes and champagne cocktails, 6g tin, £3.95, Fortnum & Mason* **7 MOSAIC MASTERPIECE** *Fleurs Mosaic rosa glass tiles, £717 a square metre, Bisazza* **8 FROM PASTA TO PASTRIES** *Rose Blush dinner plate, £6, Dibor*





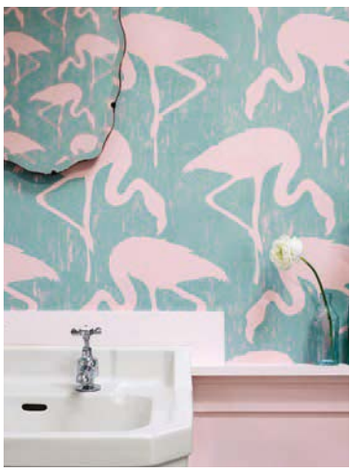
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# NOTEBOOK

Our monthly digest of inside information on people, places and pursuits

PURSUITS



## Edible Flowers

Some peppery, some tart, some sweet: edible flowers bring flavour and cheerful colour to summer salads and puddings. Bold nasturtiums, gentler borage and tangy lilac-coloured chive flowers are among the better-known edible flowers but the range is large and varied. Try daylilies, dianthus, bergamot and even hollyhocks, or fennel, rocket and basil; visit **Thompson&Morgan** for seeds.

Accurate identification is key as not all garden blooms are edible. If in any doubt, contact the **RHS** or visit its website.Those less inclined to grow their own flowers might do well to look to **Maddocks Farm Organics**, a small, family-owned farm in Somerset specialising in edible blooms. *Maddocksfarmorganics.co.uk; thompson-morgan.com/edibleflowers; rhs.org.uk/advice*

## Diary – *events worth noting*

**ARTS AND CRAFTS** The current mood for Arts and Crafts continues in a summer exhibition at Compton Verney, near Stratford-upon-Avon. *The Arts and Crafts House: Then and Now*, considers the links between home, garden and nature. New work form Rosa Nguyen, Dan Pearson, Rapture & Wright, and Timorous Beasties appears alongside items by Charles Voysey, Edwin Lutyens and Philip Webb.
*Until 13 September; comptonverney.org.uk*



**PERFECT PLASTERWORK** Individual pieces by a master of sublime plasterwork, Geoffrey Preston, feature in an exhibition exploring the history of decorative plasterwork from the Rococo to the contemporary – *Lines of Beauty*, at The Foundling Museum, London.
*Until 3 September; foundlingmuseum.org.uk*

**CLOSE-UPS** The Manchester Art Gallery hosts *Artists in the Frame*, a curation of self-portraits from artists as diverse as Grayson Perry and Van Dyck, spanning 300 years up to the present day.

## A Good Read




**Conran on Colour (Conran Octopus) by Sir Terence Conran, £25**

For those without a particular eye for colour, it is so often tempting to default to a palette of grey, taupe, and milder tints of blue. *Conran on Colour* offers a comprehensive guide to employing different hues throughout the home, beginning with the science of colour combinations, before considering specific colours and how they may be used in inspired ways and in particular schemes.


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## LITTLE BLACK BOOK

### JOANNA WOOD

The popular interior designer reveals a few favoured resources

**TRUSTED DESIGN RESOURCES**

Mulberry fabrics are beautiful and very unusual. I am currently ordering some for my new sitting room – their designs offer really interesting compositions and bring together wonderful colours. I love Colefax and Fowler, which manages to retain a classically English look, but also move with the times to keep designs relevant and appealing. Robert Langford is one of my go-to places for high-quality upholstery; his pieces are always well designed and offer fantastic value for money. Finally, I think that Paint & Paper Library has a strong selection of neutral paints mixed with more unusual and sophisticated hues.

**GO-TO SHOP FOR ANTIQUES & FURNITURE**

One of my favourites is The Blanchard Collective located in Froxfield, Wiltshire – a treasure trove of beautiful, unique pieces. I love having a good snoop and discovering hidden jewels.

**DECORATIVE UPDATES AT HOME**

I'll be looking to apply Saskia wallpaper from Lewis & Wood to add a touch of colour to my new hall and staircase.

**A TREASURED PERSONAL ITEM**

My most cherished item is my family. However, I am also very excited about a recent purchase from the saleroom at Christie's in South Kensington – I bought a beautiful pair of antique red toile lamps, which are a real find.

**INSPIRATION FROM RECENT TRAVELS**

Travelling to India was a real feast for the senses as you are bombarded with so many wonderful colours, patterns and materials. I came home with some beautiful paisley throws and white cotton cut-work for my curtains.





## Angie Lewin

Printmaker, painter and designer, Angie Lewin, has a large and loyal following. Her designs are inspired by the Norfolk coast or Scottish Highlands and have appeared in galleries around the country. With husband Simon, Angie also runs St Jude's fabrics and papers, and through St Jude's she has released Birch Tree Sun, a three-colour screenprint design originating from linocut blocks. The design is available in fabric and wallpaper and was inspired by two previous works: the 2006 engraving 'Five Trees' and a screenprint, 'Winter Birches' (left), 2010. *Stjudesfabrics.co.uk; angielewin.co.uk*



## Sebastian Cox

A young star of the new guard of craftsmen is Sebastian Cox, a woodsman making fine objects from sustainable, native woods. Commissions have included work for Heals and collaborations with Benchmark. More recently, Cox has worked on a kitchen design in partnership with DeVOL, launching this summer. *Sebastiancox.co.uk*









## Lime Wood

If a holiday in England is on the agenda this summer, one could do worse than a stay at Lime Wood, the hotel with a sublime spa, called Herb House, in the heart of the New Forest, where chef Angela Hartnett was recently appointed director. Once a protégée of Gordon Ramsay, Hartnett, with colleague Luke Holder, also features in Hartnett and Holder, a restaurant at the hotel concentrating on locally sourced English dishes. *Limewoodhotel.co.uk*



## The Goring

After a long-term refurbishment, The Goring is finally complete. Designers David Linley, Tim Gosling, Nina Campbell and Russell Sage, have brought their considerable skills to the 105-year-old hotel, which is one of the few top family-run hotels in central London. To mark the occasion, The Goring is offering a package including overnight accommodation for two adults and two children in interconnecting rooms, with the second room charged at 50 per cent, from 12 July to 6 September. *thegoring.com*

## Trematon

Isabel and Julian Bannerman have long brought the Midas touch to the gardens they have worked on and their latest project at Trematon Castle, near Saltash, is no exception. Owned by the Duchy of Cornwall since the Norman Conquest, the Bannermans moved in at the beginning of 2012 and began to plant a garden "intended to play on the castle's romantic and pre-Raphaelite glories". In the display find fuchsias, camellias, lilacs and daphnes. The garden is open to the end of September. *bannermandesign.com* ■



**FEATURE** VIVIENNE HAMBLY **PHOTOGRAPH** P23 © FIONA CAMPBELL P21 © STOCKFOOD / GRÄFE & UNZER VERLAG / SCHARDT, WOLFGANG



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# SMALL WONDER

Suzie Rowett's dainty Dorset cottage makes the perfect backdrop for this interiors-shop owner's favourite pieces



**FEATURE** ANNABELLE GRUNDY
**PHOTOGRAPHS** COLIN POOLE



Painted in Annie Sloan's Duck Egg Blue, Suzie's kitchen cabinetry is the perfect choice for her cottage. She maximised the space with a neat, hand-painted table and chairs, and made curtains and cushions using Cabbages and Roses' Natural Hatley Raspberry fabric.

Suzie Rowett appreciates the little things in life. Her bijou village cottage, two miles from the Dorset coast, is over two hundred years old, but it could have been built just for her. "I have always had a thing for tiny pieces, like china teacups, jewellery and perfume bottles," Suzie says. "This is the smallest house I have ever lived in, but it is definitely my favourite." Suzie found the cottage after searching for an old property with character. The cottage ticked almost all her boxes, although it took vision and imagination to see past its dated wallpaper, ugly terracotta-tiled floors and unappealing, ground-floor bathroom. "Everything needed doing, but I think that worked in my favour because it would have put a lot of people off," Suzie explains.

After taking possession of the cottage in October 2013, Suzie had the aim of cooking dinner there on Christmas Day. "Things were okay at first. My new bathroom was soon finished and the existing kitchen was manageable, but once the floorboards were lifted for the rewiring it was chaos," she recalls. Meantime, as new floors were laid and the kitchen was remodelled, Suzie pressed on with decorating and refurbishing the two bedrooms. With the December deadline ▸

ABOVE The use of Annie Sloan's Duck Egg Blue links the kitchen and sitting room. A cream single oven with a retro feel adds to the rustic effect.

RIGHT A salvaged wall-unit, painted in Annie Sloan neutrals, holds a mix of china, glass, pottery and metal jelly-moulds, which creates a loose and original display.







The large country-style dresser was dark brown and covered in thick wax when Suzie found it at a house clearance, "I knew it would look great with a coat of paint," she says.

*There is something intriguing and beautiful to look at from every angle*

ABOVE In the sitting room, an invitingly generous sofa, from Shy Violet, is one of the few large furniture pieces in the cottage.
RIGHT The dresser shelves are arranged with numerous treasures, including glassware, silver and china.

looming, the kitchen sink was finally plumbed in on Christmas Eve. "It was touch and go," Suzie smiles. Transforming the kitchen was the most ambitious part of the project. Sited in a small extension at the back of the cottage, its corrugated plastic roofing, old appliances and tired units were ripe for replacement.

The side-door was blocked up and French windows were added, opening into the garden. Replacing the roof meant Suzie could install a glass roof-lantern. "I wanted to use the idea of an orangery in my home," she explains. "It adds a sense of height and it was important to bring as much light into the kitchen as possible, as I knew the sitting room was going to be a bit dark." To make the most of the limited space, Suzie asked her friend, carpenter Neil Watt, to build the fitted kitchen furniture. Suzie hand-painted the cabinets in a soft duck-egg blue, a favourite colour,







LEFT A desk area was created under the sitting room window with a second-hand painted table and chair. The decorative lamp came from a car-boot sale and the vintage typewriter was found at an auction.

ABOVE Lover of all things small and beautiful, Suzie Rowett.

BELOW This pretty, painted bench was a gift from Suzie's parents and, with its lift-up seat, doubles as valuable storage.



# JAMES FINE ART



Tony Sheath, British 'A Summer's Walk'
Signed oil on canvas - 16 x 20 inches



Tony Sheath, British 'Luxembourg Gardens Cafe, Paris'
Signed oil on canvas - 24 x 24 inches



Tony Sheath 'The Lilac Dress'
Signed oil on canvas - 12 x 10 inches


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ABOVE Suzie invested in a big, comfortable bed from Loaf, which forms the centrepiece of the main bedroom. Fixed above the low window, a ruffled pelmet made from her favourite Natural Hatley Raspberry fabric from Cabbages and Roses, gives the illusion of extra height. LEFT Suzie was concerned that a ground-floor bathroom could be a drawback, so discovering the main bedroom's tiny en suite was a real bonus.

which she also extended into the sitting room. "I especially love blues and greens, and I knew I wanted to use that colour family in the main living areas," she says. "In winter I will make it cosy with splashes of red, whilst in summer I accessorise with creams, pinks and whites, so it is light and fresh."

Stronger shades of blue appear upstairs in the second bedroom and also in the tongue-and-groove panelled bathroom, where Suzie's dark and dramatic choice contrasts with classic white fittings. "That particular blue was quite intense, but I am not afraid of bold colour, and I knew that, if it did not work, it would be no problem to change it," she says.

Whilst she had little difficulty deciding on colours, she found furnishing the cottage more of a challenge. Suzie struggled to get her large sofa through the little front door, and other items, such as her wardrobes, were simply too big to go up the narrow, winding staircase. "I buy most of my furniture from auctions or house clearances and revamp it myself," she says. "I look for practical storage options and shape is important – I can deal with repairs and change colours with paint, so long as an item has good bones."

A compact living space has not prevented Suzie from creating her own distinctive, decorative look. Shelves and surfaces are deftly laid-out with trinkets



ABOVE In the guest bedroom, Suzie has indulged her passion for blues, with walls painted in vibrant Greek Blue by Annie Sloan, softened with curtains in Natural Hatley Blue fabric from Cabbages and Roses. RIGHT Suzie retained the existing layout of the bathroom, but replaced the suite and surfaces. She teamed matt travertine tiles with woodwork painted in Aubusson Blue by Annie Sloan.

and small-scale personal mementos, ranging from glassware, crystal jewellery and hand-made items to pretty postcards, shells and keepsakes. "I do not always know whether different pieces will work together until I actually start arranging them," Suzie explains. "The trick is to make it seem balanced but relaxed and random at the same time." There is something intriguing and beautiful to look at from every angle, yet no sense of clutter or disorder and no overwhelming statement pieces.

Suzie's skill in crafting her seemingly effortless displays has been honed through dressing her Dorset interiors shop, Shy Violet. "There is nothing in my shop that I would not love to have in my home, too," she smiles. "I am drawn to tiny, exquisite objects and I find that grouping them – whether it is on a shelf or peg rail or in a box frame on the wall – gives them the presence and impact they need.

"Each individual item is here because I love it. I do have a lot of stuff but, even if I could afford it, I don't think I would want a large house. I like tiny places and this house is exactly right for me. I am more than happy here." ■



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# REFORMED CHARACTER

When Jess and Simon White bought a pretty Cornish cottage overpowered by a modern extension they set about a rescue, dressing its interior in a timeworn style





**FEATURE** ALICE WESTGATE **PHOTOGRAPHS** PAUL RYAN-GOFF



This room sits in the newly added part of the house, but the roof timbers have been treated so they match those in the older parts of the building. Jess bought the antique dining room table from Andrew Nebbett, whilst the chairs came from Howe London.




Slate-flagged floors, rough plaster walls and uneven beams suggest that this Cornish farmhouse has remained untouched for centuries. But whilst some features are entirely authentic, others date from renovations that took place just a few years ago. This trickery is all down to the ingenuity of owners Jess and Simon White who ensured that, whatever changes they made, the spirit of the original building would always shine through. "We tried to picture how a cottage like this would have looked in the past," says Jess, "and then we came up with a modern interpretation that would still pay homage to that style."

The cottage, which once had a two-up, two-down layout, dates from the eighteenth century and nestles into the hill overlooking the sea. Yet when Jess and Simon bought it in 2000, its pretty exterior was marred by a huge extension that played havoc with the old building's pleasing symmetry and simple aesthetic.

"A big rectangular box had been added right on the front of the house," explains Jess. "It swamped the building and blocked the lovely view of the water. It also created lots of enormous internal hallways as well as several odd changes in level. We felt that our

ABOVE A Smeg fridge and a Rayburn are both very much in keeping with the classic styling of the house. Bespoke units, which were made by the Whites' carpenter, strike a more contemporary note.
RIGHT The L-shaped farmhouse is surrounded by a garden designed by Natalie Ashbee. Here, grasses and flowering plants abound.





Two prints by Ivon Hitchens, bought at Jonathan Clark Fine Art, pick up the warm colour of the wooden apothecary chest, which Jess bought at Annette Puttnam Antiques. A monochrome lamp from Howe London, antiquarian books from Appley Hoare Antiques and a set of potted cacti complete the still life.



*"It was very run-down. The doors on the kitchen cupboards would come off in your hands."*

ABOVE The sitting room is furnished with a bespoke sofa from Garvey Brothers and a circular metal table from Maison Artefact. The walls are painted in Quiet White by Papers and Paints.
OPPOSITE This classic chair from Howe London is made even cosier with the addition of a sheepskin. The seahorse lamp is from Maison Artefact.

priority should be to restore the scale and orientation of the original house."

The couple lived here with their two children for almost eight years before any of these ideas were put into practice. "It was very run-down," recalls Jess. "The doors on the kitchen cupboards would come off in your hands and you had to turn on all the burners on the hob and hope that one would work. The sitting room had a dark red shagpile carpet and the beams were painted black with plasterboard in between. It was very oppressive."

When work finally began in 2008, the extension was completely removed and the original cottage was reduced to a shell. Architect Duncan Mackenzie, of Mackenzie Wheeler architects and designers, came up with a scheme to add a smaller extension to the side of the house – this contained a new kitchen and a twin bedroom and bathroom above. Mackenzie also repositioned the stairwell in the new section of the house, designing a space-saving spiral staircase tucked in at the rear of the property. Finally, he recommended removing the low ceilings in the bedrooms so they would be opened up to the rafters to create a greater feeling of space.

"All the changes we made involved marrying existing features with modern ones in a seamless way," says Jess. All the original floor timbers and slate flagstones were reused and, if additional materials were needed, reclaimed ones were sourced from local salvage yards. "We also sanded back the nasty black beams in the sitting room to reveal the lovely pale wood underneath," adds Jess.

Even the smallest detailing complied with this old-meets-new philosophy, which softened the impact



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of the renovations. For example, Jess and Simon chose a textured plaster for all the walls and asked the builders to round off every corner. "This was possibly the biggest design decision of all," says Jess. "Sharp lines are all very well in modern houses, but they seem totally out of place in an old cottage. It is a subliminal thing, but the lack of angles makes the interior seem beautifully organic."

They also decided against adding any skirting boards to the new scheme. "There is not a lot of ceiling height downstairs, so the rooms look much better without too much fussy woodwork," says Jess.

For the same reason, the bespoke kitchen cabinetry is as plain as possible, consisting of handle-less wooden drawers with a simple, cream-painted finish. "The kitchen is not huge and can get quite dark," says Jess, "so I wanted the look to be light, uncluttered and fairly minimal. We then added a Rayburn to make the whole space feel more cosy."

Choosing the perfect complementary style for the interior was easy for Jess, who claims that the house practically decorated itself: "I felt I did not need heaps of inspiration from magazines or books because the scale and the construction of the building suggested exactly how it should look inside," she says.

ABOVE Framed seaweed fronds bought from Magus Antiques, plus a lamp with a coral base, give this bedroom a distinctly coastal feel. The decorative chest of drawers is a nineteenth-century Swedish piece.

RIGHT The spiral staircase was added during the renovations, but the slate treads and rounded plasterwork give it a nicely aged feel.







ABOVE The headboard in the master bedroom is covered with a fabric from Hodsoll McKenzie. Seaside features include a shell-shaped chair from Marchand Antiques.

LEFT A Duravit basin and free-standing bath by Fired Earth give the pared-down bathroom a contemporary feel. The painting by Keith Purser is from Jonathan Clark Fine Art.

However, when it came to choosing the bathroom fittings and sourcing vintage furniture, decorative objects and textiles to dress the rooms, the couple enlisted the help of interior designer Marion Lichtig.

"Marion was involved from quite an early stage, and her help was invaluable in establishing the look, which combines simple, clean lines with plenty of antiques and treasures. Together they establish a sense of warmth, depth and texture," says Jess. "I would describe the finished style as 'modern country' – it is pure, unfussy and, above all, bright."

The house comes into its own in summer, when it easily accommodates the influx of family and friends who come to enjoy the seaside life.

"When you sit at the kitchen table there is a clear vista right through the study and the sitting room to the glazed door beyond," says Jess. "When the sun sets an orange-pink light streams through the glass and fills the whole of the ground floor with a warm glow. That is just one of the many magical things about this house." ■



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# LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

When Emelia Smithson first set eyes on the drawing room of this Victorian apartment there was no doubt this would be her next home





FEATURE AND STYLING JANE STACEY
PHOTOGRAPHS HUNTLEY HEDWORTH



The decorative wrought ironwork, was installed by a previous owner. Kitchen cabinets were made by Newgate Construction, a company that makes all the fittings for the Smithson's restaurants. The cabinetry is painted in Slipper Satin and the walls in Lime White, both by Farrow & Ball.



**ABOVE** The glazed cupboard was originally a second doorway into Richard's office; the Smithsons had it modified to display their glassware with the addition of shelves and lighting. **OPPOSITE** The ornamental elephants in the porch were picked up in a French brocante. The walls are painted in Lead 1 by Paint Library.

Emelia and Richard Smithson live on the ground floor of a large Grade II listed Victorian mansion in Bristol, built in 1870. Emelia remembers the day she first stepped into the apartment's drawing room when they were being shown around. "Richard had already told me not to look keen, but to walk round quietly. 'Just nod,' he said. But I couldn't stop myself when I saw this room. I just burst out 'If I don't have it I'll die!' Richard put in an offer straight away, bless him."

They moved in immediately and, with alterations going on all around them, they set up a temporary kitchen in the drawing room. Emelia laughs as she recalls that it comprised a toaster, a knife and a chopping board. "This room only needed redecorating but we wanted to swap round the use of some of the other rooms. The kitchen was too small and there was only one bathroom," she explains. They sacrificed a couple of small rooms so that they could create three double bedrooms, all en-suite, and they moved the kitchen to its current position, a bigger room next to the conservatory. The former galley kitchen is now the couple's beautiful master bedroom.

The wonderful drawing room ceiling that first excited Emelia has been admired by many people before her, including, perhaps, Sir Winston Churchill. Before the mansion house was sold it was reported that Churchill used to stay here during the war when it was Government property. "He won't have seen the ceiling and the columns either side of the fireplace







**ABOVE LEFT**
Surrounding greenery creates an enchanting entrance to this Bristol apartment.

**ABOVE RIGHT**
The fitted window seat in the drawing room is covered with a Zoffany striped velvet fabric. The pair of sofas are covered with the Colefax and Fowler Wisteria fabric Emelia had coveted for some time.

painted the acid yellow that met our eyes, though," Emelia says. "The columns were plastered over and painted a faux marble to match the yellow Siena marble fire surround. I thought they couldn't have been solid plaster because when I tapped them they sounded hollow." Sure enough, after carefully scraping away the paint, the Smithsons discovered, to their joy, that the columns were wood.

Emelia was very clear in her mind about the finish she wanted to achieve for the columns and the beautiful wide oak floorboards. "I was trying to get that stately home or old-school-hall look, with the rich beauty of the wood brought out after years of polishing. In the end I had the entire thing French polished. It took two guys eight solid days. It was fascinating: they used walnuts soaking in a bucket," she recalls.

Most of the furniture and many favourite wall colours have travelled with the Smithsons from previous homes. "I tend to like everything the colour of muted putty or taupe," Emelia divulges. However, she did have to think carefully about the choice of paint for the panelling in the drawing room. She felt she needed a very subtle hint of green, a shade not normally found within her preferred colour palette; the reason being that she and Richard inherited a pair of large sofas from the previous owners, who found these items of furniture too big to take with them. "They were a silvery olive with a gold thread and dragons on them," Emelia explains. "Although I knew I wanted to change the fabric eventually to something I already had an idea about, if I got the shade right it would go with both fabrics."

One thing the Smithsons did buy especially for the apartment, though, was metres and metres of curtain fabric. Emelia's eyes light up as she declares: "Nothing succeeds like excess! Richard wondered why he had spent so much on silk that just lies on the carpet but I love the way it adds a bit of glamour."

Emelia is also very pleased with the wall covering in one of the guest bedrooms. She and Richard had seen four pieces of beautiful old French wallpaper hanging on display in a museum in Munich. She was able to get images of them sent to her, which she then had copied onto canvas. "It was not quite what I was expecting,"



**BELOW LEFT** Candle sconces are used as curtain tiebacks in the drawing room as Emelia wanted something big enough to match the majesty of the room. The ceiling and wall above the picture rail are painted in Hardwick White and the decorative plasterwork is picked out in Shaded White, both Farrow & Ball.

**BELOW RIGHT** Emelia created a cosy seating area at the end of the entrance hall using furniture from the Smithson's previous home.











Emelia explains. "It arrived as one huge roll, rather than four separate strips, so it was quite difficult to hang. Luckily, I know Keith Miller who is a genius with wallpaper and got it to stretch and fit the space perfectly."

As Richard is a restaurant and hotel developer, with a group of restaurants called Aqua, and Emelia is an Italian chef and cookery writer, it is not surprising that great attention has been paid to the kitchen, which was relocated to one of the biggest rooms in the apartment. The kitchen now has a large island in the middle with a enough surrounding space to allow ease of movement. Emelia has spent an enormous amount of time in her kitchen road-testing recipes for inclusion within her cookbook, *Aqua The Kitchen*. She has drawn on her vivid Italian childhood memories, when life was all about food preparation and long meals – a tradition she and Richard continue to enjoy. However, unlike her grandmother's house, where Emelia recalls little attention was paid to decoration, the Smithsons have spent just as much energy on their home as their culinary endeavours. The end result is undeniably a rich dish of style and elegance. ■

**ABOVE** The bath in the master bathroom is original to the house. "It's free-standing so it was easy to move to this room," says Emelia. The outside is painted in Farrow & Ball Shaded White. The decorative curtains are a Colefax and Fowler fabric.

**OPPOSITE** For a similar wall mural, try An Angel At My Table or Surface View.



The open plan drawing room and dining room leads off from the striking entrance hall with the same antique limestone flooring found throughout.






# *Splendid* OUTLOOK

Championing English design across the globe, Joanna Wood talks through one inspirational case study from her newly launched book

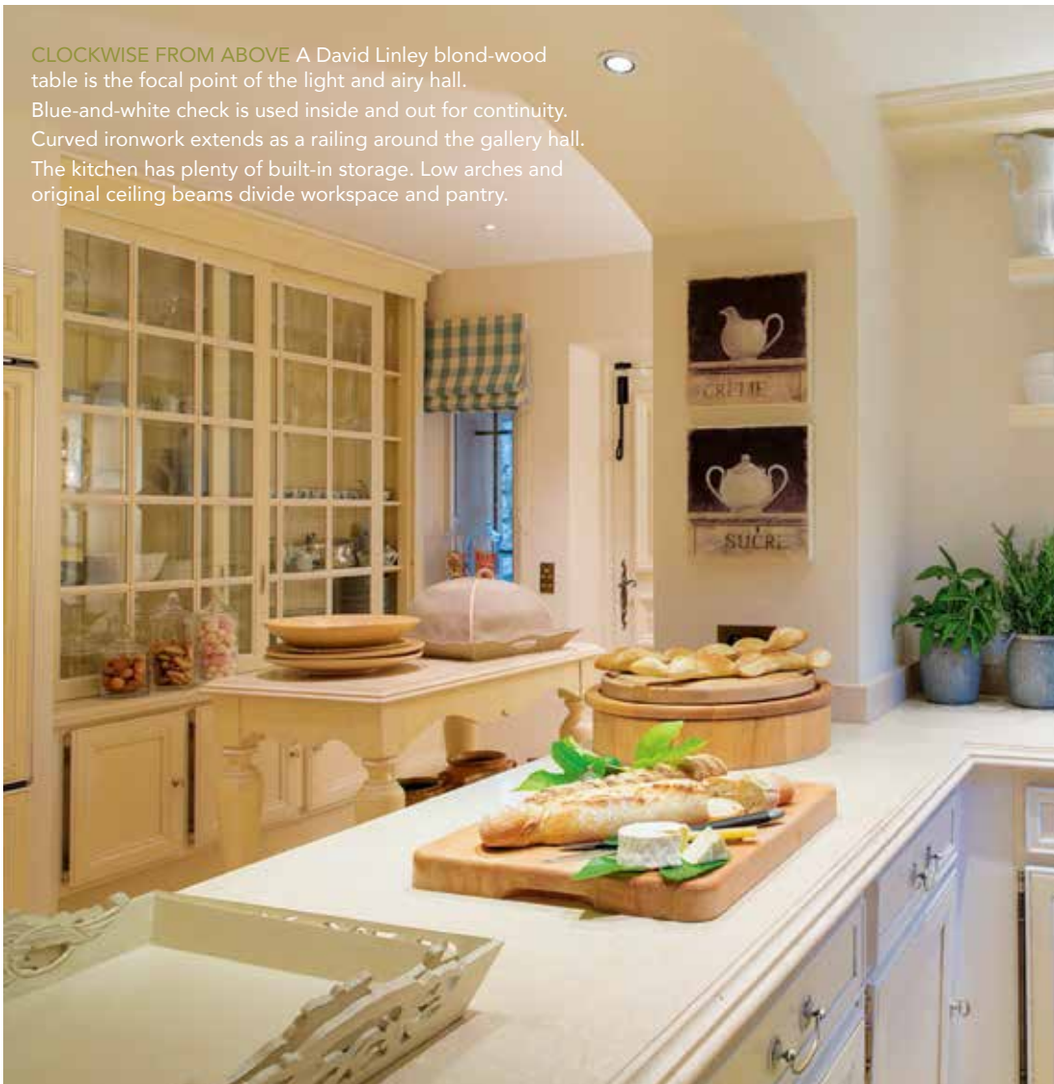
Joanna Wood is one of the leading names in English interiors. She heads a global interior design practice, which means that clients can and regularly do access her expertise for properties around the world. After more than 25 years in the business, Wood has brought together stories of some inspirational residential projects in her first book *Interiors for Living* – each project designed with huge attention to sense of location and aesthetic, but all with a delectably subtle and indefinable English undercurrent that marks all her work.

Here, she allows us an exclusive feature of a farmhouse project with insights in her own words:

"This house was originally a *mas*, or farmstead, typical of the rural architecture of Provence. Such a house was usually constructed as a long rectangle, two or








CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE A David Linley blond-wood table is the focal point of the light and airy hall. Blue-and-white check is used inside and out for continuity. Curved ironwork extends as a railing around the gallery hall. The kitchen has plenty of built-in storage. Low arches and original ceiling beams divide workspace and pantry.

three storeys high, with the family kitchen and space for animals on the ground floor, and bedrooms and further food storage on the first; it would have small, narrow windows to keep out the heat in summer and to retain warmth in the winter.

At first sight, I could see my client's house had a handsome basic structure, but no internal character at all. It was acquired as one of those heart-sinking conversions, undertaken with the cheapest fittings and no sense of style or historical integrity. However, it did have huge potential. We set about gutting it with the assistance of local contractors, opening up the small rooms and enlarging the windows to showcase as much of the spirit-lifting views as possible: the countryside by day, the stars at night.

You get a lovely sense of tranquillity by establishing an easy flow between inside and outside. On this, we worked in collaboration with Jean Mus, the Provençal landscape gardener celebrated for his poetic flourishes and passion for details. With a respect for the views from the windows, he set about creating charming vistas and quiet corners framed by trees and plants; he also provided for





*The drawing room is an oasis of calm, soft-furnished in creams and the palest olive-greys*

those all-important areas of shadow you need to protect against the sun.

The house is approached by a hillside road coming down from behind. The front door is inset within a low-arched stone entrance and takes you into a large hall; a beautiful David Linley round table in blond wood is the central feature. You walk into the house, but you see right through it to the open-plan dining and drawing room area and beyond; your eyes are drawn in by its spectacular picture window and the perspective it frames.

Throughout the ground level we put in new floors in antique limestone. To the right of the building, as you stand in the hall, is the cosy study and separate sitting room. To the left are the kitchen, pantry and staircase.

The drawing room is an oasis of calm comfort, soft-furnished in creams and the palest of olive-greys. In sunny seasons nothing distracts from the views through the picture window. Without any glazing bars, this large rectangle of glass creates a painting of the view. The window and the French windows are framed with neutral, pleated curtains.

In the winter, the handsome fireplace might become more of a focus than the view, and the room must work as a more enclosed space. The natural theme is accentuated by the sturdy rush basket full of logs for the fire and the armchairs made from a fine dove-grey rattan.

The same cream walls and ceilings create a neutral shell in the little study off the drawing room. Here, original beams add a sense of architectural intimacy. A comfy saddle-brown leather armchair and foot stool – signature pieces from Ralph Lauren – plus a trimmed sisal rug lend physical warmth,





whilst a wall lined with antique bookcases to display favourite tomes and family photographs bring in the personal touches. The bookcases, which we repainted and adapted to suit the wall, boast rarely seen original hinges and locks.

An elegant Louis XVI-style armchair with classic oval cane backrest works both as a functional desk chair and a cameo item that adds a touch of French flair in the room.

The kitchen here is restful and soothing but also homely, thanks to the original ceiling beams and low arches. The idea was to keep it simple and practical, with built-in refrigerators, pantry cupboards and wine racks. Pretty blue and white checked fabrics add softening touches as blinds and chair cushions, inspired by the china and crockery stored behind the glass doors of the kitchen cupboard.

The master bedroom rejoices in wonderful views from two aspects. The aim was to keep it airy and simple. We hung a weighty Pierre Frey cream fabric, richly embroidered with floral motifs, as curtains on the windows and from the coronet above the bed. We contrasted this with an oversized blue-and-white check on the bedhead, valance and as a trim to the characteristically Mediterranean matelassé bedspread.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The refined dining area provides a calm environment for meals.

The drawing room holds a spectacular picture window, which frames an enviable perspective.

A lavish array of crisp glassware adds instant elegance to outdoor dining.

The contrast between floral motifs and bold blue-and-white checks injects a fresh feel in the master bedroom.




RALPH LAUREN









ABOVE Make the most of leisurely summer days with harmonious indoor/outdoor living. Here, this dining table is surrounded by local-stone features and an abundance of greenery.

RIGHT Bold blue reverse toile contrasts beautifully with the mirror frames and Victorian porcelain washstand in this guest-bedroom en-suite.

The bed canopy hangs from an antique coronet, which we repainted, and the bed itself is framed by a pair of Nicky Haslam commodes, which are a contemporary take on a Louis XV chest of drawers.

Arguably, the most mood-enhancing view on this floor is enjoyed from the glorious cast-iron bathtub in the huge L-shaped space that comprises the en-suite dressing and bathroom. We carried the bold blue-and-white check through on to the walls here, and used every corner of the room to build in storage with an L-shaped 'wall feature' comprising five double-door wardrobes. The top panel section of each set of closet doors is lined with shirred gingham behind chicken wire. We also took an unremarkable antique cabinet and turned it into a vanity unit, repainting its trim with blue highlights.

A significant part of my brief was to decorate to enhance my client's collection of twentieth- and twenty-first-century paintings, notably work by the Scottish colourists. Their highly developed use of colour encapsulates the philosophy of our own decorative dynamic. During the 1920s and 1930s, this group of painters absorbed and reworked the strong and vibrant colours of contemporary French painting (Monet, Matisse and Cézanne) into a fresh and distinctive idiom of their own. On a domestic level, we were also taking the best visual aspects of the locality and applying it to our contemporary design vision." ■

## MORE DESIGN INSIGHTS

- Do source antique porcelain sanitary ware. In a period property, bathrooms often ruin a theme, if kitted out with modern sinks and tubs. Vintage pieces add character and style, however, I do not recommend old taps and fittings as it is too difficult to find spare parts for the working bits.
- Look out for old chests of drawers, cupboards or commodes to repaint. Take off the top and replace it with stone or marble and you have a fabulous new piece of furniture.
- Built-in wardrobes can block out space. I like to put contrasting wallpaper on the back wall to regain a sense of depth and provide a touch of glamour.
- Think seriously about the orientation of your bath and what you would most like to look at. A window? A painting? Definitely not the door.




For more inspirational insights, and to enjoy eight additional projects, purchase *Interiors for Living* by Joanna Wood, £50, published by Prestel ISBN 978-3-7913-4737-0



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A rare moment of stillness as Raymond Blanc is persuaded to sit for a portrait, and views the famous lavender walkway through the windows at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons.

# *Appetite for Life*

Despite the still heavy Gallic accent, Raymond Blanc has lived in Britain for over 40 years and has enthusiastically made England his adoptive homeland. Editor, Kerryn Harper-Cuss went to meet the man we have embraced as a national treasure

Driven is a word often bandied around in the context of people and their careers – but in the case of Raymond Blanc I cannot think of any term more fitting. His much lauded achievements in the championing of gastronomy, horticulture and hospitality have undoubtedly had a deep and significant impact upon our country's aspirations, and have directly precipitated chain reactions in English culture. His passion for provenance and seasonality has been pivotal in our increasing national focus on celebrating local, regional and timely culinary ingredients. His loving creation of Le Manoir Aux Quat'Saisons over the past 30 years, with its inspirational gardens and interiors, is widely regarded to have resulted in one of the most beautiful luxury country house hotels in Britain. All this even before you add Le Manoir's two Michelin-starred restaurant status into the equation. Yet here is a man whose mission is clearly not quite finished.

From the moment we meet, it is obvious that Raymond Blanc (or RB as his team refer to him) is a man with an insatiable appetite for life – he does not so much arrive as surge into the room – a vigorous, engaging force of energy intent on making the most of every moment of conversation and sweeping you along in the most captivating way. We tend to think of his genius as a chef – and this passion remains absolute – but what many are not aware of is just how involved Blanc is in the design of the







RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM Le Manoir, owned by travel connoisseur company Belmond, is one of the most highly regarded hotels in Britain. The restaurant has retained its two Michelin-starred status for 29 years. The prolific kitchen garden is the source of an enormous variety of seasonal produce for the menu, with the best varieties of fruit and vegetables selectively honed over years of meticulous trial and error.





TOP TO BOTTOM Raymond Blanc opened Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, located in Great Milton, Oxfordshire, in 1984.
From fabrics and furniture to ceramics and flowers, everything within the Blanc de Blanc suite is a shade of white: a lesson in luxurious layering.

gardens, and in the conceptualising of every detail of the interiors, too. Each of the 32 rooms and suites at Le Manoir is the result of a very personal vision, having been directly inspired by experiences Blanc has had during travels. "Every room has a big story behind it," he admits. One suite was inspired by a visit to Northern Thailand and a view of a cloud-shrouded mountain near Chiang Mai. Blanc worked on this room with "the lovely [interior designer] Emily Todhunter". He wanted a bed put on a platform "with three steps up, to express the mountain — metres of organza to represent the cloud around it, a low ceiling as you enter the room, then opening up."

The Blanc de Blanc suite (see right) was a concept that percolated for decades until the right space was found. The scheme was inspired by an event hosted by Veuve Clicquot at a chateau in Versailles: "It was about 20 years ago. Everything in one room was white — it was mind blowing — all about purity." Similarly one of Le Manoir's gardens is an evocation of a Japanese Tea Garden that Blanc visited and has successfully re-imagined.

He is very clear that this is about passion and determination rather than having a professionally trained eye: "I am not a designer — I have every respect for designers". Indeed he has worked with some of the very best, including architectural building specialists Symm, garden tour de force Chris Beardshaw for the recently created wildflower meadow, as well as local craftsmen. But he does give unequivocal direction. "I know exactly what I want — I've got a sense of space, of textures, of light, mood — at every hour of the day. Before doing a room I will be in that space for a year just feeling it. So I am completely involved in every detail of every room, or the garden or every aspect of service." He goes on to say, "I hate the word compromise — completely — but you have sometimes to accept. It is the hardest thing to learn."

Much of Blanc's personal artwork collection hangs in the hotel and many of the items that furnish the rooms are objects discovered during his global travels — from an eighteenth-century opium chest to a bed that he had transported halfway around the world. He is minutely focused on detail, and he even personally sketched out a carpet pattern for the Arabesque suite — first on paper at a desk, but then, unsatisfied with a lack of proper perspective, painstakingly upon enormous pieces of paper on the floor — a process he reveals took three days to achieve.

This quest for perfection is repeatedly apparent. Endearingly, Blanc seems compelled to point out the tiniest of imperfections — drawing attention to a bespoke light switch made to his personal design, which he thinks, in retrospect, is an overcomplicated result; and the edge of a beautiful stone bath surround, which protrudes, he thinks, just a few millimetres too far.

This intense desire comes always from the thought of the guests. "It's not about ego. It is all about making the guest feel instantly 'at home' and [creating] an experience that they will feel for a long, long time." He later expands, "I believe very strongly that luxury must be inclusive, must have humanity at the very heart of it."

Blanc's connection with Le Manoir is without question a love affair of the most intense variety. He says of the house, "I feel everything here with every fibre. When I first saw this house I fell in love so completely with it — I love the mini grand drive, the different gardens, the yellow stone from Oxfordshire. I fell into a fairytale.

"I feel very privileged to have worked in this space. Although the house doesn't belong to me any more [Blanc works in partnership with owners Belmond], it belongs to me emotionally, aesthetically.

"I have celebrated *l'entente cordiale* all my life. Here, I am effectively celebrating [the idea of] an English/French home, where these two cultures have merged and, I like to think, enriched each other."

"That's what you try to do with a hotel, create 'home'. You are so completely involved in every single micro detail. If with all of your intelligence, and all of your team's intelligence, you lovingly add these [seemingly] insignificant layers you may eventually capture excellence." ■

**FEATURE** KERRYN HARPER-CUSS **PHOTOGRAPHY** P62 AND P64 (TOP) ANDREW HAYES-WATKINS, P63 (CENTRE) DAVID GRIFFEN

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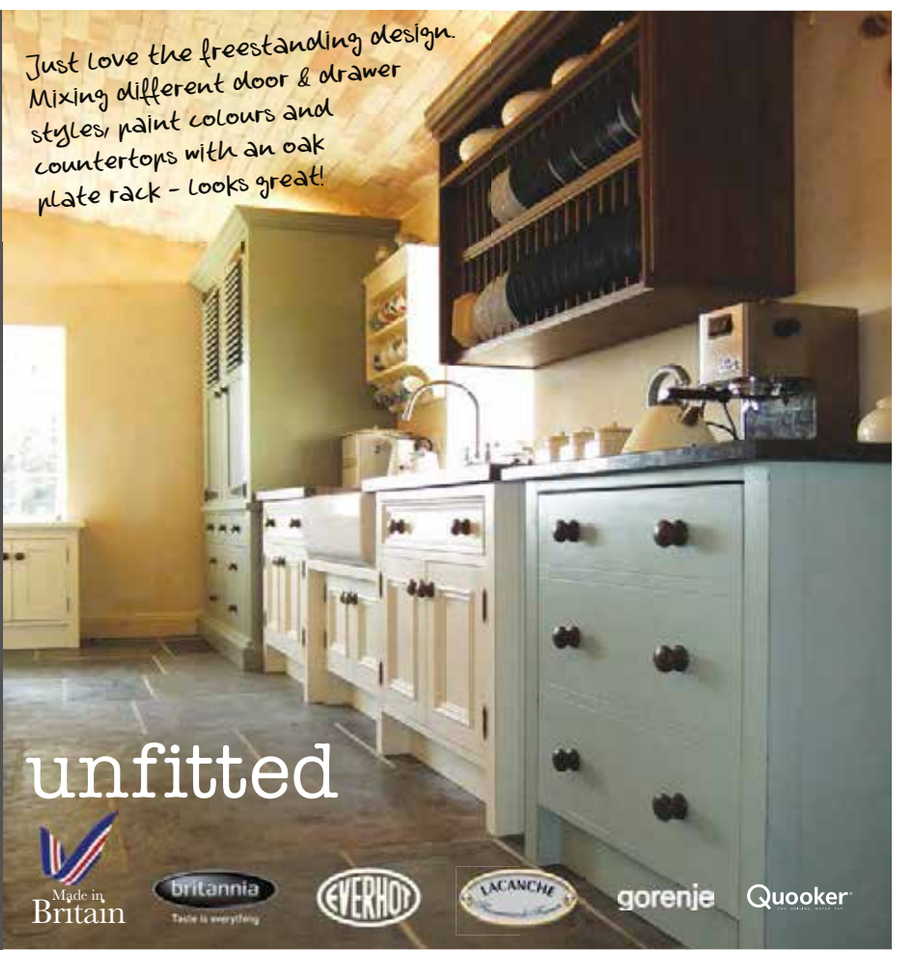
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# STYLE INSPIRATION

Romantically-inclined design | Dreamy ideas for bedrooms | Elegant exterior style



## COLOURFUL COMPOSITION

Vessels are all too often stored behind closed doors, yet a collection of bold glass jugs and vases can make an instantly jolly focal point (with or without flowers) and are more likely to be spontaneously used (for an impromptu supper with friends, for example) when easily on view. Turquoise is having something of a moment in interiors, but accessories are far less commitment than jewel-coloured walls or curtaining, and this is a lovely, relatively inexpensive way to make a nod to a strong flavour in decorative design. Hobnail pitchers with a strikingly noduled outline are also very much in vogue but not a modern option. Fenton Art Glass in America first created such a pattern in 1940 — now widely copied today. *Hobnail Jug, £95; Vases, from £44; Glug Jug, £35, all I&JL Brown*

32 pages of design and decorating advice ▶







# *Romantic* FLIRTATIONS

Dabble in a summer romance with a nod to pretty, feminine flourishes. Rather than a full-blown affair of purely pinks and blowsy florals, this more refined approach is alluring, charming and relaxed

Romantic notes add just the right touch of seductive feminine allure. However, the trick is to keep the overall feel pared back and simply pretty, rather than too girlish or elaborate. Combine delicate details with a slightly smarter, utility feel. Furniture can have a French or Scandinavian influence and will benefit from a love-worn patina. Rather than fancy laces and silks, look to practical linens with embroidery flourishes, and use discreet finishes, such as pleating or a frilled edge, to add a sweet dose of charm. Use a natural, creamy palette, with a smattering of duck-egg blues, greys and browns, highlighted with a judicious use of pinks for a radiant blush.

LEFT **Simply beautiful**
This kitchen is the epitome of understated romance. The palette is light, calm and muted, with only the tiniest hint of pink. Simply having curtains rather than cabinet fronts beneath the worktop, along with a faded floral tablecloth, creates a more feminine feel.
*Tablecloth, Oyster Roses, £62 a metre; under-counter curtain in Charcoal Stripe, £62 a metre; pink stone-wash lampshade, £82, all Kate Forman*

ABOVE **Sweet nothings**
Accessories can bring just a whisper of prettiness. A discreet flourish of delicate embroidery or the lacy edge of these napkins is all that is needed to be suggestive of alluring femininity. Elsewhere in the home, seek plain linens to pair with embellished pillowcases for a similar effect in the bedroom.
*Lace inset dusty pink napkin, £18; Cotton voile hand embroidered napkin, £17, both Rachel Ashwell Shabby Chic Couture*

**Daisy, daisy**
A lacy curtain would be a little too fussy for this look but this sheer with a small embroidered daisy has a dainty simplicity that is on point for this style of setting. Used as a Roman blind, it provides just enough diffusion of light on sunny days and the cheerful motif will brighten up cloudy times, too.
*Paquerette madras, £72 a metre, Anna French*



*"For sure so fair a place was never seen, of all that ever charm'd romantic eye"*

John Keats, English Romantic poet (1795-1821)

LEFT **Playing with blues**
Pink is not the only way to bring a graceful charm to the home. Duck egg and powder blues can have an equally pretty and feminine effect and work well with natural clay, slate and cream hues, too. In years gone by, pale baby blues were actually considered more delicate, befitting for a girl, whilst pinks were viewed as a stronger shade, tempered from red, and thus more suited for little boys. It is only in recent decades that the gender associations for these colours switched.
*Chunky stonewashed linens, £54 a metre, Peony & Sage*

RIGHT **Joyful blush**
Of course, for some, pink is the classic choice for a pretty scheme, thanks to its affinity with blowsy summer roses. This flirtatious approach, however, requires restraint in using blush hues. Here the colour is uplifting and brings life to the whole room but, on close inspection, pink is restricted to a few cushions, a throw and some flowers. Even the header of the sheer curtains is a barely-pink putty hue. The rest of the scheme is pared back, with wood flooring, a natural-fibre rug and French furniture, all accentuating the look in a beguiling manner.


Maison



**Luxury details**

Duck-egg hues with flashes of raspberry is a subtle approach. Note, too, the understated luxury of the scheme: heavy pleated curtains puddle decadently on the floor, with a trim that matches the cushion. Even a simple detail such as deeply buttoned upholstery adds a level of opulence. The glamorous gilt pelmet is balanced with a simplified rose motif, rather than busy chintz.

*Red Rose linen, £52 a metre; Beech Fan Edge trim, £15 a metre; button-backed armchair in Feathers linen, £995, all Susie Watson*







ABOVE LEFT **Wings of love**
By keeping décor clean and simple, decorative and fanciful accessories can be used to full effect. This candlestick features exquisite, irresistible detail with hand-painted porcelain. The glow of candlelight come nightfall will be particularly enticing. Wall sconces with exotic parrots are also available.
*Petit Oiseaux bird candlestick, £90, An Angel at my Table*

ABOVE **Pearly queen**
Often furniture, although beautifully crafted, is bought for its practical value. This chest of drawers is so gorgeous it could be bought solely for the decorative impact it will have in a bedroom. Hand carved with shimmering mother of pearl inlay, it is refreshing to see this style on a pale mango wood rather than ebonised finishes. Perfect for a light, airy scheme.
*Pearl Inlay Dresser, £1,600, Anthropologie*

LEFT **New identity**
There is something rather charming about repurposing pieces, giving them a new lease of life whilst the object adds character and intrigue to the home. This lovely mirror is a French-window panel, and still includes the metal handle. Similar could be achieved with old panelled doors by inserting mirrors. A slightly distressed finish gives a love-worn patina, which is perfect for this look.
*French window mirror, £295, Decorative Country Living* ■

**FEATURE** KATY MCLEAN **PHOTOGRAPHS** *P69 SARAH PANKOW. P71* © LIVING4MEDIA/GREAT STOCK!



Outdoor lighting can give real presence to the simplest doorway. These Portico wall lights by Davey Lighting have been carefully considered to reflect the detail of the doors. *Portico wall lights, £629 each, Davey Lighting*

FINISHING TOUCHES:

# THE STYLISH EXTERIOR

Whilst the focus can often be on interiors, the exterior of a home requires the same approach to finishing touches. Mary Carroll details which features really make a difference

How often have you been stopped in your tracks walking down a pretty street with smartly finished front gardens and roses round elegantly painted front doors? When I was busy snipping and clipping plants in the front garden of a previous home, I was stopped no end of times for information on the colour of my front door. It was Farrow & Ball Bone, which changed with the light from a subdued lovat green to a sophisticated taupe. It was a bit of a triumph colour.

Finding the most suitable shades for exteriors takes experience as well as some trial and error, whilst the paint finish can have a bearing on the look too. A high gloss is very handsome on a door with plenty of wood-trim detail as the light catches the paint at different angles. Satin gives a softer finish and particularly suits muted tones.

If attending to the render or brickwork of your home take time to consider the choice of paint here, too. It is all too easy for painters to pop down to the local merchants and pick up what they can get hold of at the time, but it is you who will be living with the colour for years to come. Make sure to enquire locally to help aid a decision; if you see a similar style of property in a colour which you think really suits, there is no harm in knocking on the door and asking for the name of the paint, even if you do not always get an answer.








RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM Interior designer William Yeoward cleverly stages plants on different garden features, whilst imposing obelisks (this one came from garden guru Rosemary Verey), stone urns and an elegant picket fence create a sense of drama. For further inspiration, *William Yeoward at Home* is published by CICO Books.

Eminent garden designer Arabella Lennox-Boyd uses plants to create colourful exteriors. Here, beautifully trained wisteria artfully frames the windows.

The striking blue of this ornate porch works well against the exposed brickwork. *Drawing Room Blue exterior eggshell, £58 for 2.5 litres, Farrow & Ball*

There are so many different shades within the spectrum of cream, which perform so very differently in winter and summer light. There is also value in researching the many paint collections now championing colours that represent Georgian or Edwardian periods. A genuine colour comes to life on a related property, as much research will have gone into the pigments used during that period, with the new colours replicating the original hues as closely as possible. Do test out paint colours next to any brickwork and window frames in order to assess the complete palette of materials that will make up the intended exterior.

Good-looking ironmongery on a front door says so much about the owners. There is a house-proud aura around a polished brass knocker and letterbox. Antique brass, which takes constant cleaning, has given way to new brass finished with a lacquer coating so that cleaning need not be a weekly chore. Do ensure a clear view of the house number or name. It is so helpful for people to be able to easily locate a home so take care positioning this important flagpole of information.

If you have inherited a front door that has been stripped of period features, consider replacing plain glass with stained or bevel-edged glass. This sort of detail just sings quality and has a discernible impact on property value.

Porches are always an added bonus for a property, not just for sheltering whilst opening the front door but also for setting the scene for visitors. A pendant or wall light sets the mood for evening time and is helpful and welcoming for when anyone arrives after dusk. Dimmer switches, which are beneficial for interiors, are particularly useful here too, as they create a porch that can be flooded with light or at other times given a more subtle glow.

Adding sentinels in the form of planted pots or standing dogs gives presence to a door or porch. The many shapes of box topiary are forever stylish and can be under-planted with seasonal flowers to ring the changes. Planted pots near a front door tend not to enjoy the full force of a rain shower so choose plants that can withstand a dry spot and are tolerant and easy to care for. I love to use Skimmia for its flowers and berries — it can be under-planted with geraniums to keep its good looks going year round and is very resilient. Always remember pots are portable, so utilise this fact and move things around as the seasons progress for the best show and the most stylish entrance. For those who are keen to have roses or wisteria round the door I would strongly advise having the front of the property professionally wired for climbers. Strong horizontal wires can be pinned into the mortar to create a framework that plants can easily latch on to. All too often climbers romp away, becoming unruly and overgrown, making them too heavy for insubstantial wires. Consider, too, the type of pathway leading up to the front door. There is nothing like brushing past swathes of lavender for an atmospheric entrance, so turn this into an inspirational area to plant an attractive introduction. Lavender has several very good stages from spring until the end of summer, although its lifespan is between seven and ten years so be prepared to remove and start again.

If the pathway is letting down the complete look, use a jet spray to revamp the surface; these are easily hired, although once bought they remain forever handy. Think about having existing paving slabs re-laid to give a pathway a new lease of life; it is much cheaper and more authentic than starting from scratch. Those in a country location could add a small creeping plant, such as thyme or camomile, between the slabs to maximise a charming country effect. If there is a front gate, see this as an extension of the front door design when deciding on styles and materials.

Window boxes create a beautiful effect indoors and out. It is important to ensure window boxes have adequate drainage, otherwise the plants have their feet in water and window sills may become damaged. To do this, stand the window boxes on specially made feet and ensure that there is plenty of gravel in the base of boxes for free flowing water. Positioned on front or back windows, window boxes make the perfect transition between home and garden.

*There is nothing like brushing past swathes of lavender for an atmospheric entrance*

With very low maintenance required, box balls also create a very smart look and, for those who forget to water, there are some very lifelike artificial options available. Buy the top quality versions, as these are the most realistic, but ensure that they are cleaned regularly to keep them looking fresh.

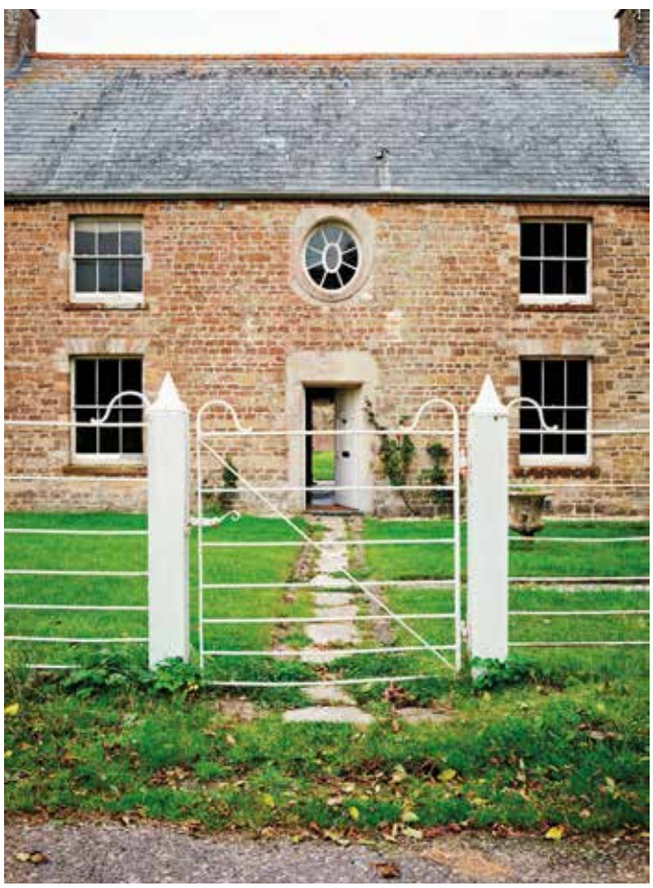
When working on the rear of your property, the finishing touches you create can be much more intimate. A terrace or patio provides the opportunity to create a room outdoors. Never underestimate how much space is required for a good-sized patio, particularly if envisaging billowing planting and pots. Search out the perfect table and chairs first and see these as very much part of the finished look.

Window treatments can make a significant difference to the exterior of a home, too. Shutters are a wonderful way to bring a pleasing sense of uniformity to the front of a property. Choose all half-shutter or full-length versions, rather than a mix of the two, and select a colour or wood finish that complements and enhances both the interior and exterior.

When thinking through curtains and blinds, consider how they will look from the outside. The same lining for both a blind and curtain combination, and indeed the whole of a home, will give a cohesive look. For a softer look still, a natural linen lining has a quiet charm all of its own, which creates timeless elegance — something we would all aspire to for the exterior of our home.





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Using architectural features combined with a sympathetic colour palette is terribly attractive. *Fava exterior eggshell, £28 a litre, Marston & Langinger.*

Linking home and garden is beautifully demonstrated in *English Decoration* by Ben Pentreath. The white painted gate is 'pleasing in its simplicity' at this house in Dorset.

Create impactful exteriors with light and dark shades. *Off-Black exterior eggshell; Blue Ground exterior eggshell; Wimborne White exterior eggshell, £58 for 2.5 litres, all Farrow & Ball*







# Exterior Style Resources

Create an inviting first impression with Mary Carroll's sources of inspiration

LEFT TO RIGHT
Adding a little paint can soften large areas of brickwork. *Pure White masonry paint, £62 for 5 litres; Chancery wood and metal eggshell, £24 a litre, both Mylands*
Exterior light fittings crafted from zinc are renowned for their durability. *Large Olympic Wall Lantern, £660, Hector Finch*
Respected interior designer Katharine Pooley uses colour and detail to bring a high level of style to outside entertaining. Visit katharine pooley.com

MARSTON & LANGINGER This remains a beguiling outdoor paint collection alongside the garden room portfolio the company produces. They have also developed a primer that provides an excellent base for many paint brands.
*marston-and-langinger.com*

MYLANDS PAINT This brand has been making paint since 1884. The Colours of London collection is very interesting and indicates exceptional shades for different architectural periods.
*mylands.co.uk*

COURTYARD ACCESSORIES Every possible window handle, knocker, letterbox cover and piece of hardware you could wish for in a very comprehensive selection of materials.
*courtyard-accessories.co.uk*

HECTOR FINCH A striking collection of lighting for porches and exterior walls. The zinc models are particularly attractive, ageing beautifully over time to become part of the history of a home.
*hectorfinch.com*

ROOM IN THE GARDEN Jan Howard was amongst the first to produce attractive rusted plant supports. Her garden empire continues to produce beautiful ideas with her original plant supports working well as sentinels either side of a front door.
*roominthegarden.com*

GARDEN TRADING A smart company with a handpicked feel to all the collections of furniture and planters. They also stock more unusual finds, such as a wooden wheelie bin storage unit.
*gardentrading.co.uk*

MCKINNON & HARRIS The most exceptional finishing touch for a patio. The highest quality aluminium furniture is finished in luxurious paint shades, with each piece resonating period detailing.
*mckinnonharris.com*

SUCCESSFUL SMALL GARDENS
This timeless book by Roy Strong remains one of the most inspiring gardening books on creating structure in small spaces with so much relevance to front gardens. Published by Conran Octopus. ■

PHOTOGRAPHS P75 (TOP) GAVIN KINGCOME. P75 (CENTRE) ANDREW LAWSON. P77 WHITE PAINTED GATE: LOUPE IMAGES/JAN BALDWIN



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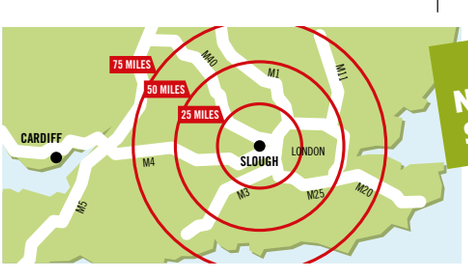
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Handmade, these exclusive Neisha Crosland tiles are inspired by the patterns found on classic parquet floors and architecture. Demonstrating Crosland's eye for beautiful proportions, the collection comes in an array of soft pastel hues to create a sophisticated finish.

*Neisha Crosland Florentine paquet Molly pistachio, £10.98 each; Malia bath with Avebury bath/shower mixer; 'Yes your honour' paint, all Fired Earth*

# BY DEFINITION: WALL TILES

Tiles present a timeless choice for embellishing walls, and are available in a wide variety of textures, sizes and finishes. Here is a brief introduction to some essential terminology

CERAMIC AND PORCELAIN
Ceramic tiles are made from clay, with or without any other materials, whilst porcelain also contains finely ground kaolin, feldspar or silica. Porcelain tiles are formed under higher pressure and fired at a higher temperature than ceramic tiles; this process creates a denser, more durable, almost water-resistant tile. Glazed porcelain and ceramic tiles are manufactured with a glaze applied to the tile face. Through-body porcelain is when the colour and design is the same all the way through the tile, so wear and chips are very hard to detect.

ENCAUSTIC TILES
Sometimes called 'inset' tiles, this refers to a traditional method of creating decorative tiles from clay or cement where the pattern is inlaid into the fabric of the tile, not laid upon it in the form of a surface impression or glaze. Modern encaustic tiles are created using a two-part process: first pressing the coloured clay into cavities within the tile mould, and then placing the mould face-downwards into the base colour. The tiles are then fired or, more traditionally, dried in the fresh air; most tiles are then glazed. Because they are handcrafted, encaustic tiles are not uniform, which is part of their charm, but this also means that there may be pigment variation or uneven edging.

Encaustic tiles underwent a revival in popularity in Victorian times, when they were often used to decorate hallways, the cavities surrounding stoves and in alcoves. Today, they are often associated with tiles originating from Morocco or Turkey but contemporary designers are using the technique to create dramatic, geometric feature walls.

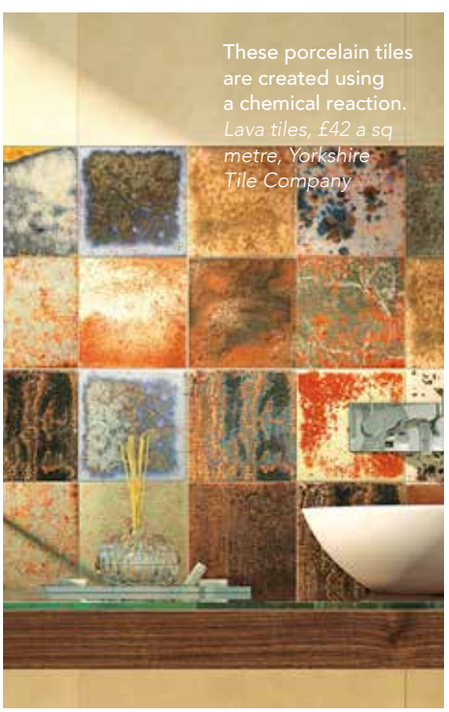
EDGE FINISHES
To avoid the abruptness of a straight-edged tile, edges may be bevelled – that is angled rather than perpendicular to the face of the tile – or bullnosed, finished with a rounded edge, sometimes this is also referred to as cushioned or pillow-edged. Edges are sometimes chipped or left rough and textured to give an antique or rustic appearance.

LISTELLO TILES
Taken from the Italian word, this is a decorative border tile that is used to add interest or to cap a tile installation. The main tile is referred to as the 'field' tile.

RECTIFIED TILES
These tiles are baked in sheets, then cut after they have been fired in the kiln, rather than the other way around, which is the most common mode of production. The effect is to create tiles to precise specifications that consequently require a minimal gap in between. Sometimes called a 'credit card' joint, the gap is often as little as 1.5mm, creating a minimal, contemporary appearance. Non-rectified tiles may have a marginal level of variability between tiles from the same batch and so require a wider joint to compensate.

VITRICATION
Tiles are characterised by their water absorption level, which is determined by immersing the tile in water, then measuring the resulting increase in weight. For a wet room, bathroom, splashback or for exterior use, it is wise to choose a fully vitrified tile, such as porcelain. These tiles have been chemically altered during the firing process to ensure that the tile is virtually non-absorbent – this is generally classified as a water absorption level below 0.5 per cent. A semi-vitrified tile absorbs water at a level between 3 and 7 per cent, whilst a non-vitrified tile has a water absorption level above 7 per cent, making it suitable only for dry, interior wall use.

PEI RATING
The Porcelain Enamel Institute (PEI) has established a testing system to assess the durability of the glaze and the consequent suitability of tiles for use in various settings: the higher the rating, the more resilient the tile, with PEI 0 being for dry, interior wall use only, to PEI 5 for heavy traffic, such as commercial or hallway flooring. For bathroom walls, PEI 1 and above is recommended, whilst a rating of at least PEI 2 is advised for areas such as exterior patio walls. ■



These porcelain tiles are created using a chemical reaction. *Lava tiles, £42 a sq metre, Yorkshire Tile Company*

**FEATURE** DEBORAH GRAY **PHOTOGRAPH** THE YORKSHIRE TILE COMPANY

PROMOTION

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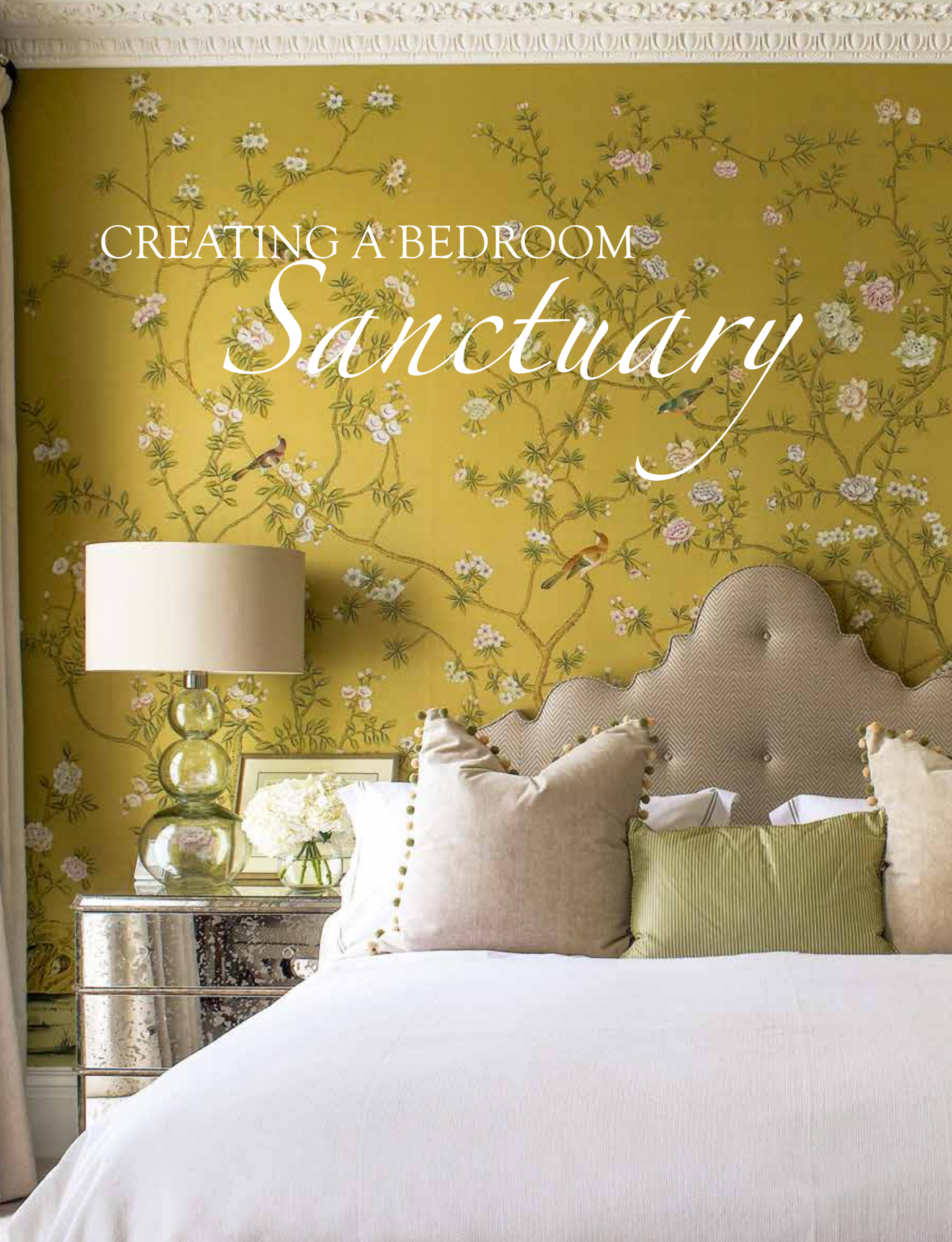
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CREATING A BEDROOM
Sanctuary



Make a dreamy bedroom retreat with decorative inspiration from one of three alluring design themes

Whilst reception rooms are often decorated with a view to being used for entertaining guests, and therefore in some ways designed as an evocation of our 'public' face, bedrooms are entirely personal and private spaces seen only by intimate friends and immediate family. Here we can seek sanctuary and, in decorating terms, express ourselves in an uninhibited way. Some will prefer to create an oasis of calm, others may want to create a secluded place with a feminine touch, and others still will choose decor that sets a more informal atmosphere than elsewhere. Here, we explore three key flavours in bedroom style to inspire new looks to personalise at home.

## MODERN PRETTY

Colourful, confident and just a little bit quirky, the Modern Pretty bedroom celebrates the individual, offering a bold (but never strident) look that is just right for those of us who enjoy a contemporary aesthetic but prefer it to be softened a little around the edges. This is a style that perfectly complements the crisp, modern, light-filled home, introducing impact in the plainest of spaces, though there is absolutely no reason why it should not equally be employed in a period property as a wonderful foil to traditional architectural details. Particularly popular at the moment (and seen in all the right places, from quirky online shops to the high street), this look is an antidote to the careful beiges, greiges, stones and neutrals that have predominated for the last few decades, and combines a passion for colour with an appreciation of beautiful patterns and simple forms, as well as a desire to look afresh at preconceived notions and introduce new ideas to our interiors.

LEFT A hand-painted wall covering in Chatsworth design on a pea-green dyed silk by de Gournay sets the tone for this room scheme conceived by Turner Pocock.







## STYLE NOTES

- Florals with a contemporary twist, in either graphic or painterly designs.
- A mix of unusual fabrics and finishes, such as mohair and tweed.
- Strong, jewel-like colours, but not harsh primaries.
- Eclectic and not overly serious, but still smart.
- Modern (or a contemporary take on traditional) furniture and some craft pieces.















CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

Pretty accessories Gilt-and-mirror trays with delicate trim are ideal for showcasing scent and make-up on a dressing table. *Oval Galleried Mirror Trays in gilt or silver, from £15, An Angel at my Table*

Blossom on walls This tranquil bedroom, designed by VSP Interiors for a private client, features hand-painted cherry blossom silk wallpaper.

Sinuous shapes A classic chest of drawers gains a modern twist with a pale blue trim. *Île De Ré chest of drawers, £795; large Porthole mirror, £160, all Graham & Green*

Tactile effect Bright throws and various textures give this room a modern zest. *Classic bedlinen in white and silver, from £45 for a standard pillowcase; mini lambswool knit throws, £450 each, all Josephine Home*

Painterly florals Watercolour effects in bold hues work well for this look. *Camilla cushion, £75, Bluebellgray*

Jewel bright hues Try stylised florals in bright blues and lime. *Curtains in Grimaud, turquoise, £95 a metre; chair in Marmande, emeraude, £85 a metre; cushion on chair in Grasse, emeraude, £89 a metre, all Manuel Canovas*

Bolder upholstery Add contrast buttons to a headboard for further interest. *Bedhead in Soho Silk Lago and Soho Silk Peridot, £34 a metre; cushions in Soho Silk Peridot and Soho Dash Catamaren, £65, a metre, all James Hare*

THIS PAGE

Light appeal Consider using a striking lamp base for good effect. *Wisteria table lamp in Green, £135; Taupe silk shade, £54, all Pooky*

The key to this look is colour. Brave colour. Deep, vivid, unexpected colour, including Fuchsia, turquoise, lime, orange and royal blue. Hues employed individually – against white or stone to moderate the impact – or all together (if you have the nerve) to fabulous effect. This is where a feature wall in one strong shade will transform a room, or even the simple addition of a bright headboard or a two-tone throw can make all the difference.

Modern Pretty is not only about blocks of colour, however. Contemporary floral designs, either graphic or painterly in style, are fundamental to this mix, introducing a vital sense of delicacy and charm without reducing the overall impact. Another important element is texture: the unexpected addition of an unusual material, such as a velvet-covered armchair, a tweed headboard or a chunky-ribbed cushion, can turn a dreary room into one that dazzles.

Well designed, unfussy furnishings suit the Modern Pretty look best. Clean outlines and sparse shapes allow the colours and patterns to sing for themselves, and these are often modern pieces. One-off, craft pieces have their place, too, with their hand-made and unique character. That said, antique furniture or classic designs can be given a dramatic new life when looked at afresh: traditional upholstery with contrast-coloured buttons, an extra-high headboard, a table lamp with a brightly coloured new shade, or a chest of drawers given a surprising paint effect, for example. This look is, after all, nothing if not individual and does not necessarily obey the usual rules.

Whilst the big picture is important, individual items can make a great deal of difference, and this is a chance to include eclectic accents, such as vibrant rugs and cushions, intriguing light fittings, mirrors and wall art, or fabulous window treatments. It may even be something as discreet as a pompom trim, a coloured-glass vase or a bookcase in which the books are arranged in rainbow colour order. The idea that this look does not take itself overly seriously is what makes it so very enjoyable.



## MODERN PRETTY RESOURCES

- Bluebellgray for bright, painterly prints on fabric and bedlinen. *bluebellgray.com*
- Designers Guild for upliftingly vibrant floral textiles and linens. *designersguild.com*
- Graham & Green for furniture and accessories with eclectic charm. *grahamandgreen.co.uk*
- James Hare for opulent silk fabrics for curtaining and headboards. *james-hare.com*
- Josephine Home for top quality bedlinen and bold-hued throws. *josephinehome.co.uk*
- Manuel Canovas for boldly beautiful fabric designs. *manuelcanovas.com*
- Pooky for printed lampshades. *pooky.com*
- Rothschild & Bickers for hand-blown glass lighting. *rothschildbickers.com*
- Teasel England for deliciously tactile woollen weaves ideal for sumptuous upholstery. *teaselengland.com*

## CLASSIC WITH A TWIST

Elegant, sophisticated and timeless, yet also warm, inviting and eminently liveable — we are rather good at Classic with a Twist. It recognises the best from our past, combined with a contemporary aesthetic in a way that is both traditional and timeless.

The origins of this style lie in the enduring designs of our history, from the grandeur and formality of the stately home to the solid good looks of Georgian and Victorian interiors. At its core is a tradition of high-quality production, from hand-weaving to block printing, furniture-making to upholstery, and it incorporates a host of beautiful furnishings without which no English home would be the same, whether it be Harris tweed, a Wedgwood plate, a Chippendale-style chair or a hand-embroidered cushion cover. Whilst there are still a host of makers who work to age-old styles using traditional techniques, a good choice of original pieces may also be found at auction houses or antiques shops large and small.

Classic with a Twist styling is, however, no stuck-in-the-mud style that suits only historic piles. Whilst it would be very much at home in a large estate or country manor, it suits even a modest townhouse or a large city apartment down to the ground. Quality, after all, is universal. This choice of decorative style is not without up-to-date touches. Who would be without the comfort of a well-made, modern mattress, or really good bedside lighting, for example? A contemporary sense of light and space, too, suits this style — whilst always combined with a respect for the calm control of order and symmetry.

In these bedrooms, an appropriate architectural background is important: a classic fireplace, sash windows and panelled doors; and wood panelling or walls divided by a dado and picture rail, with cornices, ceiling roses and architraves in classic styles. Hardwood floors, planked or parquet, are ideal, topped with a rug — perhaps Oriental, an Aubusson or else a one-colour plain with a gorgeous texture. Windows are refined and discreet, dressed beautifully with full-length curtains, but without overtly drawing











## STYLE NOTES

- Elegant, mature and inviting without being overtly traditional.
- Fine antiques and the occasional well-made, sophisticated contemporary piece.
- Smartly-tailored upholstery rather than informal loose covers.
- Sophisticated neutrals, or perhaps classic colours such as plum or navy.
- Embroidered details, polished wood and paintings.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

**Poster star** The classical idea of a four-poster bed is used in a room with a fresh modernity. *Morris bed (king size), £7,665 (mattress & divan not included); bed drape in Candour sky, £90 a metre; bedspread in Fiorita indigo, £79 a metre; Bickerton commode, £4,097; Bedale occasional table, £795; Fulvia lamps in steel blue, £795 each, all William Yeoward.*

**Period echoes** The design of this fabric derives from an 18th-century sarong. *Bed upholstered in Dianthus Chintz fabric, from £240 a metre; Tambour Drum Cabinet, £6,900; The Bedside Reading Wall Light, £1.125; all Soane Britain.*

**Tailored pieces** A tweed upholstered footstool with turned legs and brass castors makes a modern alternative at the end of the bed. *Fairford footstool in Harris caramel, from £512, Parker Knoll.*

**Elegant simplicity** Luxurious fabrics offer indulgent simplicity. *Curtains in Monet Morning Snow linen, £139.50 a metre; bed in Heritage Paisley, £207 a metre, and Feather cashmere, £461 a metre, all de Le Cuona.*

attention to themselves, whilst walls are similarly understated – perhaps a mellow pattern, a moulded or printed paper, or simply painted in a neutral shade. Overall, the key is to avoid loud or clashing patterns, and to restrict colours to a harmonious palette. They may be muted or strong, but they always work well with the rich tones of dark wood.

A bedroom decorated in a style that fits the Classic with a Twist ethos is likely to include a pleasing combination of good quality, older furniture, a smartly desirable antique or two (or top-notch reproduction), but also the occasional, well designed, more modern item. Mahogany, oak, satinwood and walnut finishes, in neo classical or Rococo forms, are absolutely right, as are touches of brass or silver, marquetry, hand painting and inlay. A luxuriously upholstered headboard or perhaps even a four-poster bed are desirable, as are elements such as deep-buttoned seating with neat piping, an elegant desk or dressing table, imposing mirrors and grand chandeliers as well as table lamps – think brass, glass, ceramic or turned wood, in classic shapes, such as columns, urns or obelisks.

Soft furnishings are smart and unfussy yet have tactile appeal, combining luxurious plains and interesting patterns such as trailing or oversized florals, chintzes and toile de Jouy. In other words, traditional prints but judiciously used in a more pared-back, contemporary way.

As for bedlinen, look to simple shades, including plain white, off-white or neutral tones, perhaps with some lovely edging, such as Oxford borders or drawn-thread work. Carefully layer this with gently patterned throws, boudoir cushions, and perhaps a bedspread or an eiderdown in suitably tonal colours.

Classical vignette Use timeless pieces to help create a focal point around a chest of drawers. *Hand-carved and hand-painted commode with curved legs and base, shown here in Nordic blue, £1,269; curtains in Fleur de Bissau in deep blue & gold, £211 a metre, both Chelsea Textiles*

Elegant setting Goblet-pleated curtains and fine furniture combine for a mature and delicate room. *Curtains: Malmaison damask, £125 a metre; wallpaper: Woodville plain, £57 a roll; headboard: Hanover £90 a metre; bedspread: Quartz velvet silver, £102 a metre, all Zoffany*



## CLASSIC WITH A TWIST RESOURCES

- And So To Bed for timeless beds with a nod to heritage styling. *andsotobed.co.uk*
- Beaudesert for bespoke four-posters with or without drapes. *beaudesert.co.uk*
- Chelsea Textiles for hand embroidered textiles and classically Swedish inspired furniture. *chelseatextiles.com*
- Counting Lambs for a gently modern take on the eiderdown. *countinglambs.co.uk*
- De Le Cuona for alluring weaves, particularly elegant paisleys. *delecuona.com*
- Soane Britain for craftsman-made furniture, lighting and textiles. *soanebritain.co.uk*
- William Yeoward for cushions, glassware and accessories. *williamyeoward.com*
- Zoffany for timelessly alluring fabrics for curtains and upholstery. *zoffany.com*


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## SOFT COUNTRY

The perfect complement to cottages with thick walls, small windows and beamed ceilings, the Soft Country style also works beautifully in larger homes where there is not too much of a sense of grandeur. Comfortable, welcoming and utterly unfussy, it immediately brings to mind the pleasures of England past, from the scent of freshly mown grass to strawberries and cream for tea and cricket on the village green.

A pleasing, well-worn patina adds character to these bedrooms, whether it be a lumpy plaster wall, distressed paintwork, a threadbare rug or sun-faded fabric. Colours are soft — cream, buttermilk, pink, lilac, and so on — whilst patterns (trailing florals, ditsy buds, blowsy chintz and simple checks) are not too carefully matched. Here, surfaces are important, from hard brick and stone, block-printed wallpaper, old timber floorboards, to soft wool throws with fringes, quilted eiderdowns and rag rugs. Fabrics, of course, are key, and amongst an array of florals one will find tweed, lace, ginghams, stripes, spots, paisley, tapestry and embroidery along with textural plains, such as linen, wool and mohair. Windows are understated: a pair of gathered curtains, a simple blind or even wooden shutters, whilst upholstery might feature either neat piping or frilled edges. Beds, of course, are always layered with cosy throws, blankets and cushions.

Soft Country furnishings have been lovingly collected and lived with over the years, be they family antiques, country pieces, hand-made items or vintage finds. Hard-wearing, honest and effortlessly attractive, such pieces are sturdy, simple and generously sized. Essentials include metal beds, roomy armchairs, solid wardrobes and chests of drawers, simple wooden chairs, stools and bedside tables, deep-buttoned ottomans and the occasional wirework or Lloyd Loom piece, as well as chests, trunks, blanket boxes and wicker baskets. Lighting might be twinkly glass chandeliers of the simpler variety, vintage hinged-arm table lamps or virtually any kind of plain base with a fabric or card shade. As for accessories, think













CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

English charm Rose motifs and a strawberry hue — what could be more English?
*Hatley fabric, £48 a metre, Cabbages & Roses*

Pretty in pink Fabrics made in England.
*From top: Himbleton; Hanbury; Lulsley; drawstring bag in Pixley Rhubarb, from £68 a metre, all Cloth & Clover*

Pastel notes Re-cover furniture with a faded floral motif.This setting by Rachel Ashwell, Shabby Chic Couture.

Dreamy white
With limited colour texture is important.
*Brompton bed linen in silver, from £26; Belgravia throw in silver-grey marl, from £170, both The White Company*

Floral repeat
Country prints offer a rosy setting.
*Delilah wallpaper, £45 a metre; pink Sophia linen, £62 a metre; ruched shade in Kitty, £98, all Kate Forman*

Embellished charm
Embroidered linens sit well in these schemes.
*Tess pillowcase in Chalk, £40 a pair, Christy, exclusive to John Lewis*



## STYLE NOTES

- Delicate colours mixed with off-whites and stone hues, and the occasional stronger blue or red.
- Faded, distressed paint finishes.
- Gathers, ruffles, pleats, scalloped edges and bobble trims in pale hues.
- Natural and found objects such as pebbles, seed heads, feathers and driftwood.
- Hand-made and vintage furnishings, mixed with country pieces and cherished antiques.



needlepoint samplers, old paintings and botanical prints, blue and white china, pressed glass and masses of fresh flowers displayed informally in anything from jam jars to enamel pitchers.

In a sense, it is hard to describe this as a 'style' as such, its very essence being an unaffected lack of 'style', owing everything to gradual evolution allied with practical considerations, as opposed to deliberate decisions to do with surface appearance. That said, it does share some elements in common with English country-house style, as established by socialite decorator Nancy Lancaster in the 1920s and 30s, including a lack of clutter, worn fabrics, a dash of nostalgia and a feeling that the room has been used and enjoyed for many years. Whilst today's Soft Country may take influences from the penchant for Scandinavian, French country and vintage styles, it ultimately never moves too far from its English roots, and some of its best proponents are the British-based companies, old and new, that are committed to designing and making on a small scale, using traditional materials and established techniques. ■







ABOVE Muted colours, pretty florals and pompom trimming help to create a Soft Country look.
*Curtains in Duck Egg Apple Blossom Silhouette, £52 a metre; pompom trim, £15 a metre; armchair in grey/ivory Oxford, £950, all Susie Watson Designs*

RIGHT A simple, stylish palette creates pared-back allure.
*Bedhead in Skyros embroidered linen, £113 a metre; Toulon vase, blue, £288; Lily linen lampshade, £107, all Vaughan*

FAR RIGHT An attic room with an eclectic blend of fabrics.
*Headboard, blind and bed base in Chelsea Check, £48 a metre, Lewis & Wood; quilted bedspread, £180, and matching cushion, £55; mohair throw, £96; all Joanna Wood.*

BELOW A touch of pink and cream adds delicate warmth.
*Delilah wallpaper, £45 a metre; pink Sophia linen, £62 a metre; ruched shade in Kitty, £98, all Kate Forman*



## SOFT COUNTRY RESOURCES

- Christy for pretty, well-priced bed-linens in gentle prints & weaves. *christy-towels.com*
- Cloth & Clover for fabrics printed in England in a delicate colour palette. *clothandclover.com*
- Kate Forman for antiqued effect textiles with a French inspiration. *kateforman.co.uk*
- Peony & Sage for romantic printed fabrics, eiderdowns and even lampshades with country motifs. *peonyandsage.com*
- Susie Watson Designs for mid pastel fabrics with a soft boho undercurrent. *susiewatsondesigns.co.uk*
- Cabbages and Roses for faded effect florals with vintage looks. *cabbagesandroses.co.uk*
- Volga Linen for beautifully draping pure linen fabrics available by the metre, as well as bedlinens. *volgalinen.co.uk*

FEATURE KATHERINE SORRELL



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# INFORMAL CHARM

## Style secrets from three experts creating interiors that are beautiful, yet designed for a relaxing mood

Much in the same way that the most beautiful woman is one who feels comfortable and happy in her skin, the most welcoming of homes are those that feel informal, relaxed and decorated with the confidence to be personal and feel lived in. These homes are not scruffy or cluttered, but neither are they pristine and untouchable. They are considered and elegant, yet invite guests to curl up on the sofa; beautifully decorated, yet not stiff, and most of all, they reflect the character and personality of the owner and the way in which they live. Here, three proponents of relaxed living offer insights into achieving comfort and good looks.







CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Haslam's cosy sitting room features personal touches and mementoes. Furniture is positioned close together, to invite intimacy.

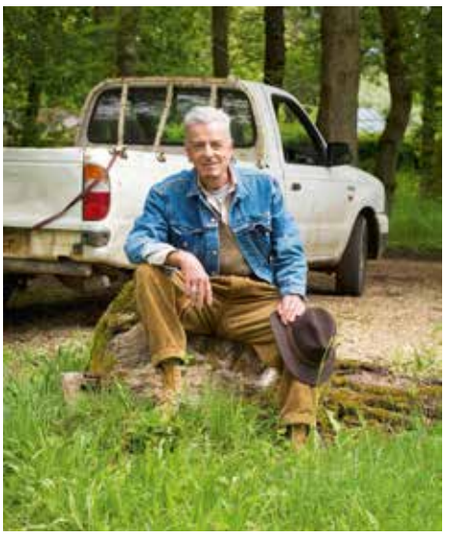
A drinks trolley sets a welcoming mood.

Haslam enjoys the sculptural quality of boots, displaying them in his dressing room rather than stowing them away.

A more formal room retains an intimate and approachable country-house feel. Haslam used cottons rather than too many silks and ensured nothing was deemed too precious.







## NICKY HASLAM

RENOWNED INTERIOR DESIGNER AND FOUNDER OF NH DESIGN

"I believe rooms should make you smile. Happiness is so important. I learn what makes a client laugh and the way they live so that the room will make them happy. This, I think, is what makes a room, and a home, feel comfortable.

In my own home I display lots of keepsakes and mementoes — I like souvenirs of places, I have been — I even have ash-trays from restaurants to remind me of happy nights out. On my mantelpiece [see main image] I just put lots of little pictures, postcards and invitations, rather informally. I try to steer clients, not into collecting something necessarily, but getting enough objects or things with a similar theme to make an impact and show personality.

I like surprises, too, and to not be clichéd. For example, I loved the colour of a red, plastic lobster, so I stuck it in a bowl on a side table. It is unexpected.

I think any object can look pretty if treated in the right way — by displaying something that is not usually displayed, it can almost become a piece of art. In my dressing room, I have my boots on display, partly because there is nowhere to hide them, but mainly because I like the look of boots, they are very sculptural.

Not being too precious about things is key to making a home feel relaxed. If things are too precious it says 'Don't touch me!' Furniture should be very close together, people always take it too far apart and isolate certain objects, pieces of furniture or certain areas. Rather, the room should flow so the eye can move over everything in one sweep. Tables should be practically touching sofas, picture frames should touch lampshades, so you get a comprehensive overview rather than singling things out, or making furniture feel static and formal.

In a project for a client who had a larger sitting room [see bottom left] that had to contain amazing paintings, they wanted a relaxed country-house feel. Here, despite the large proportions, there is a sense of intimacy as everything is close together. I avoided too much silk and used lots of cottons for a less formal feel. I don't really believe in a strict mix-and-match approach, but I do find if you have a palette that works you can have fun with it and use an assortment of textures and patterns.

Furniture choices, too, are important in ensuring comfort. I think people make the mistake of having too soft a sofa. I like a harder sofa myself — sofas that you sink into and can't get out of, in the end aren't comfortable. You need that balance of comfort and ease of getting in and out of it. I like to have other seating options, too — there is a well known rule that no matter how long a sofa is, only two people will sit on it. Upholstered coffee tables are a good choice for providing another seat, as well as a comfortable place to put your feet.

Finally, I think you do need to edit from time to time. You don't want things to become too cluttered — you need space to put things down and too much becomes uncomfortable, but keep the things that make you smile."



## ATLANTA BARTLETT

INTERIOR STYLIST AND CO-AUTHOR OF *KEEP IT SIMPLE: A GUIDE TO A HAPPY, RELAXED HOME*

"It has always been my ethos that a home is for living, first and foremost. When my husband and I got together we had a mantra that any house we had should be party-proof, which morphed into being childproof as we started a family. But if you can't have friends over and have a party then what is the point? Your home is a personal sanctuary, not a show home.

We both love things for their imperfections. We often re-purpose salvaged pieces, but we don't do this as a style statement, but from an ethical point of view, and a financial necessity. When we decorated our first home we did not want mass-produced furniture, but quality pieces that were affordable, so we ended up in junk shops. We fell in love with the character and patina of older pieces and it became part of us and how we decorate. You can't really go out looking for a specific piece to salvage, though — you could search for years and never find it. Rather, we collect things as we see them and keep them in storage, then, as we decorate our home, or a client's, we think about what could be used for that spot — perhaps an old door we could use as a frame for a mirror or a work bench as a table.

A lot of our relaxed approach is about balance. We believe in having personal objects, but too many possessions clutter the mind so it's good to get rid of anything you don't use or love. Curation is so important and, although this approach is relaxed, it should be considered. If you only have things you love then you will find everything can look beautiful together. There is charm in things being mismatched — such as the dining table [see right] set for a dinner party. We are great believers of using what you have, while for others having everything matching might be a priority. For us though, the cobbled-together look is what is so attractive. Note, though, that all the chairs are pretty — a collection of ugly chairs wouldn't have worked. By having only lovely things in your home you have confidence to pull them all together when you need to. We are not ones for too much clutter, though — too many possessions clutter your mind, but in the same breath you can't strip everything away or the home will be soulless. The relaxed approach is all about balance. You wouldn't wear everything in your wardrobe at once, so there's no need to have everything out all at one time. I like to have a collection out for a time and then move things around and get out some different pieces to ring the changes."

*For a special reader offer to buy* Keep It Simple *at a reduced price, please sign up to our newsletter at theenglishhome.co.uk*



*"We fell in love with the character and patina of older pieces and it became part of us and how we decorate."*





LEFT Although a lot of effort has been made dressing the table, there is a relaxed, inviting mood with purposely mismatched chairs and vintage china.

ABOVE "Lots of people say my house is white, but I look around and see a lot of colour," says Bartlett. Accessories bring doses of colour that she can change with the seasons. Loose covers fit the mantra of party-proof and childproof.

BELOW RIGHT "The natural materials, such as wood and stone are all part of a palette, too." Here a cosy snug features rich woods and leather with pops of lime and pink in cushions, for a cosy, yet low-maintenance, finish.

BELOW LEFT A display of plates adds a cheerful note to this kitchen. Note the distressed finishes and unmatched table and chairs. "Love imperfections!" enthuses Bartlett.

*Images from* Keep it Simple, *by Atlanta Bartlett and Dave Coote, photography by Polly Wreford*
*© Ryland, Peters & Small*
















CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Manor Farm is very much a working farm. Schwerdt was keen to keep the original, enormous flagstones exactly as they were.

The dining room is used primarily in winter as a 'party room', complete with year-round decorations. Kilims are used as curtains and as a tablecloth.

Colourful upholstery enlivens neutral walls and sets a fun and inviting tone in the sitting room.

The kitchen dresser houses a host of objects, from storage jars of flour and sugar to kitsch mugs and teapots, Russian dolls, amusing postcards and family photos. "We take everything off once a year or so to clean it and then things are omitted when we put it all back so we can start again," reveals Schwerdt.

A cosy corner of another sitting room features shelving the couple made to house their books.







## SASHA SCHWERDT

FREELANCE STYLIST AND FORMER ART DIRECTOR FOR LAURA ASHLEY

"Our house is run very much as a working farm and family home. We live seasonally using the kitchen most of the year for dining, the garden in the summer and our dining room for winter dinner parties. We eat seasonally, too, and use things we grow, and only ever have cut flowers from the garden. The way we live in it is relaxed, we do not worry if things do not match or if the paint is starting to peel, it all adds to the character — we wanted a house where the horse could come in for tea.

We bought the farm 13 years ago when it was a complete wreck and needed total renovation and restoration. We lived in one room while we slowly worked through the house floor by floor. Often people start with the main rooms but then you end up ruining them as you start work on the upstairs. We completely finished each room, and moved on. Everything was bought as and when we needed it. We didn't have any furniture so we found things at auction or farm sales or they were handed down to us. We also salvaged pieces and adapted them - for example we were given a bed but it didn't have a headboard so we bought a nice shutter at auction and turned it on its side. We don't really have any formal pieces of pristine furniture, everything is a bit bashed about and we don't worry about it.

I wanted to be sensitive to the house and ensure it was breathable, so chose lime washes and distemper in quite a muted palette, so I could use colourful accessories. Lots of people advised me to pull up the flagstone floor and put under-floor heating in, but I didn't want to have to seal them in or risk them breaking or not being returned exactly where they were. I found a balance between the house feeling decorated, but still breathable and not over-done. I don't over-style anything; I find you just find things that work in a space, and our style is rather eclectic.

My husband and I are attracted to bright fabrics and pick things up when we are travelling, not from smart shops. In the dining room we used some old Kilim rugs, we bought years ago in Istanbul, as curtains. We haven't cut them, just folded the top over like a pelmet and used hooks in the back so it can still be used as a rug. I also use a rug as a tablecloth here — it's brilliant if someone spills wine, as it doesn't really show and you can just vacuum it up. It's all about making things easier. People are in and out with wellies all the time, and if we have people to stay they can just put their feet up, lie on the sofa, light the fire, and feel at home. We have spare wellies, coats and slippers for everyone. It's quite nomadic.

I don't think anything was really pre-determined, everything evolved organically and responds naturally to the way we live, which is in harmony with the farm. It's very much a living house." ■

*Schwerdt is represented by her dog Winnie, who enjoys finding a cosy spot in the hallway. Manor Farm is available for location bookings for film and still photography. B&B weekends are available with a guided tour of the farm and gardens. For more details, visit manorfarmthornfalcon.co.uk*

FEATURE KATY MCLEAN PHOTOGRAPHS LOUPE IMAGES/SIMON BROWN

# A COUNTRY CLASSIC

The traditional country kitchen is the heart of any home, offering a taste of enduring bucolic warmth and charm, with an informal mix of cosy character and practicality bursting with individuality

Not simply the domain of the rural retreat, the archetypal country kitchen relies more on look than location; thus allowing its relaxed, homely appeal and informal aesthetic to be translated to all manner of properties.

Fashioned from timber, in natural and painted finishes, cabinetry often centres round simple Shaker styling, or more grandiose period-inspired fielded panels. Many believe the eclectic mix of the country kitchen demands a careful selection of generously proportioned free-standing pieces but it is feasible to recreate rural charm using fitted units. The secret is to ensure cabinets do not appear overly unified and sit beside older items to instil a lived-in look.

This is a kitchen all about comfort and character, so look to key ingredients such as a deep ceramic sink, a generous large-scale scrubbed table and plate racks brimming with china. Modern appliances and gadgets are best kept behind closed doors, whilst a touch of the vintage and reclaimed ensures this timeless classic retains its inviting, homely mix.






## ARTISAN APPROACH

Emphasis here is on craftsmanship and time-honoured techniques. Timber cabinetry exhibiting dovetailing and mortise-and-tenon joints is a sure sign of excellence, as is the use of in-frame doors and carved or turned detailing. "Carving in particular is a skill that maintains a sense of heritage and quality, as it cannot be easily or cheaply achieved," says Peter Humphrey, founder of Humphrey Munson. However, adornments, such as pilasters and dentil cornicing, must remain in keeping with the style and scale of your home. The use of decorative inscribed words can be regarded as both a means to add personality and an attractive organisational tool.

*Nickleby range Cook's Pantry in smoked oak, £3,200, Humphrey Munson*





## TRADITIONAL LAYOUT

Historically, the country kitchen was structured around the working triangle, where the main centres of activity – sink, cooker and fridge – are ergonomically positioned to form the points of a triangle, thus allowing ease of movement between the three. Care, however, must be taken to ensure the overall distance does not fall below 5-7m, or one's working area could feel rather cramped. Such arrangements tend to work well in more traditional functional layouts, but can also be maintained in larger and, increasingly, open-plan formats. Resist the temptation to simply place units around the perimeter and instead break up the space with a table, island, peninsula or larger storage pieces.

*Bespoke handcrafted kitchen, from £35,000, Bryan Turner Kitchen Furniture*



## FARMHOUSE ESSENTIAL

The dining table is at the very heart of the country kitchen – a place to gather, relax, eat and prepare food. "Oak's robust nature makes it ideal for hardwearing kitchen tables," says Sarah Morrison, creative director at Garden Trading. Finishes such as wax and oil can be re-applied to oak as required, or look to the past with painted and bare pine. Alternative materials to wood can also work well. "Zinc-topped designs are incredibly durable," explains Morrison. Extendable designs are always a flexible option, and do not be afraid to mix it up with assorted chairs, benches and stools – all softened with comfy cushions and pads.

*Billy smoked oak extendable table, £695; George chair, £290; Cedric carver, £225, all Loaf*



## RURAL BACKDROP

It pays to make the most of original features so look to highlight beams or exposed roof timbers for true authenticity. Revealed brickwork also harks back to the very fabric of the home and can be sealed or painted for textural appeal. Rough plaster and soft limewash finishes guarantee rustic charm. Use under-counter curtains instead of cupboard doors for extra appeal. Should a more sophisticated finish be required, then abandon the distressed in favour of chalky matt heritage paints by the likes of Farrow & Ball and Little Greene. Tongue-and-groove panelling is a staple of country residences, both large and small.

*Fabric door curtains in Clemence, £79 a metre; walls in Florrie, £52 a roll, both Sanderson*

## VERSATILE PALETTE

Painted cabinets are a country favourite. "They are practical, versatile and can easily be updated," says Debbie Bowden, designer at Barnes of Ashburton. Whilst pastel hues and neutral shades still abound, people are increasingly brave in their colour choices. Bowden is a fan of stronger, "earthy shades of blue and green that take inspiration from nature." Bolder, statement shades are popular with some, but for the cautious, Bowden suggests: "Painting a central island in an avant-garde shade to create a note of colour against a neutral kitchen." Be sure to consider painted finishes in combination with timber, for authenticity.

*Bespoke handcrafted Limewood kitchen in Farrow & Ball's Blue Gray with granite worktops, from £30,000, Barnes of Asburton*





## TIMELESS TILES

As an alternative to hardy flagstones, Victorian tiles offer a decorative and versatile approach, thanks to endless applications both simplistic and bold. "However, do consider the size of the space and the look you want to achieve," advises Jenny Wasson of Original Style. "Small stone tiles, in both brick and square format, can also be laid in a variety of patterns," Wasson explains. Terracotta brings instant warming appeal. All require sealing, so for a low-maintenance substitute try indestructible porcelain replicas. "Do consider footfall when selecting colour as paler shades will inevitably require more cleaning," warns Wasson.

*Greyfriars Abbey limestone tiles, from £58.29 a square metre, Original Style* ■





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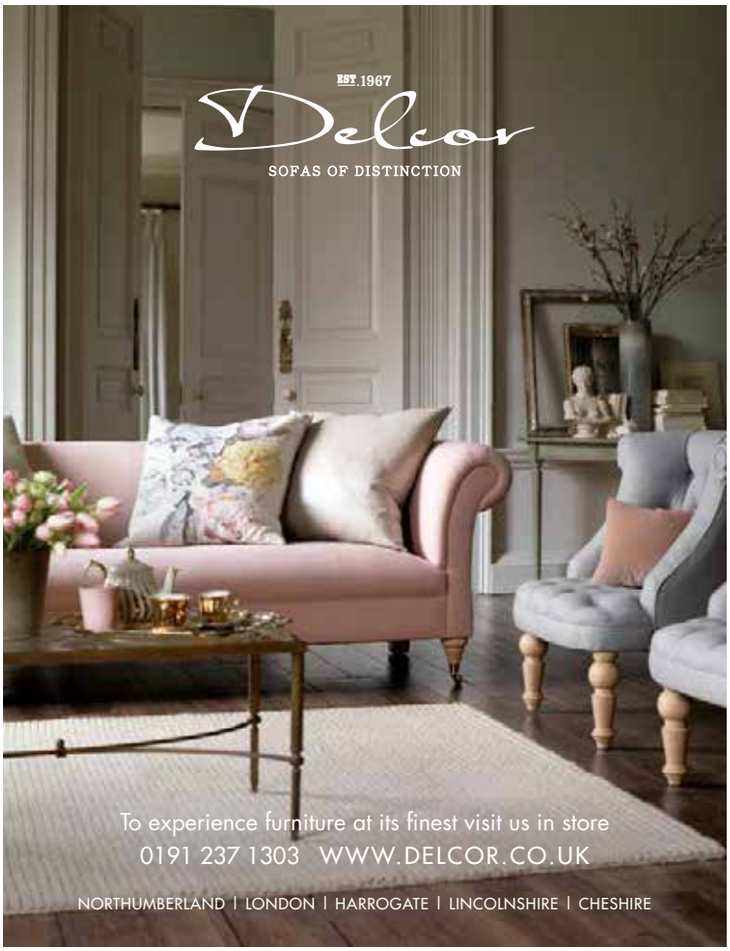
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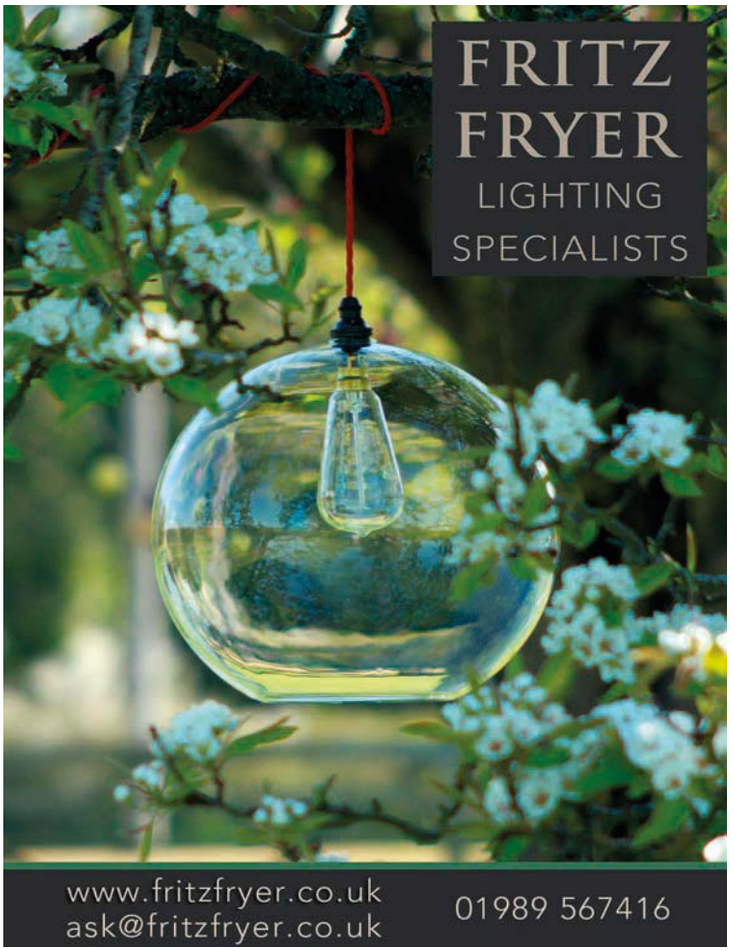
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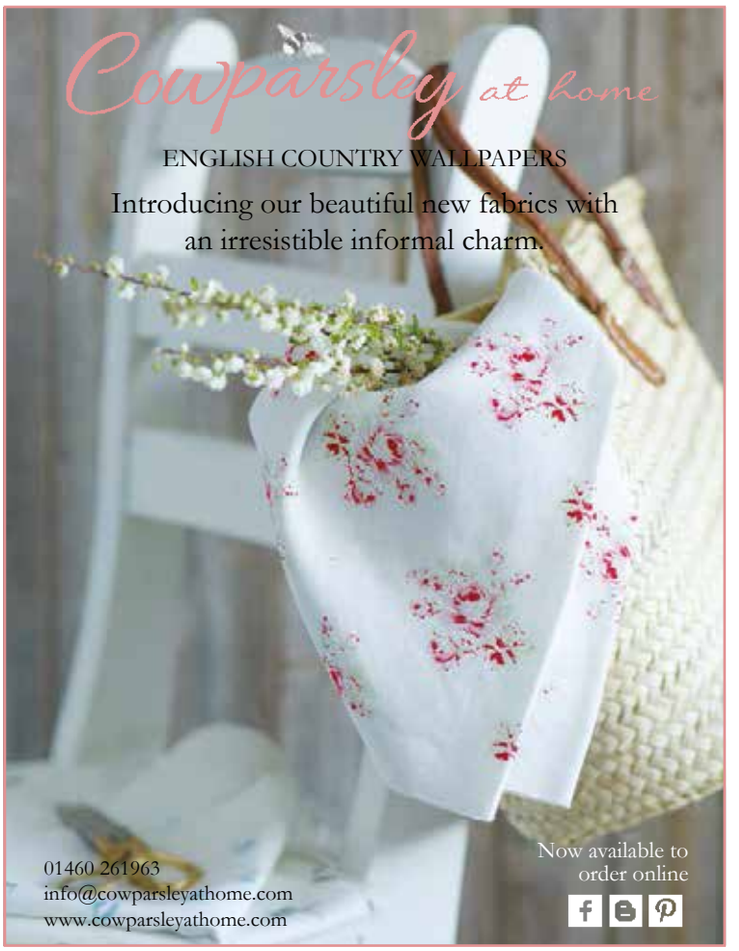
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FEATURE KATY MCLEAN PHOTOGRAPH © MODE/FRAZER CUNNINGHAM/ALAMY

26 pages of summer pastimes and village pleasures ▸



# *Summer* PURSUITS

Long days bathed in glorious sunshine can be an infrequent occurrence, so make the most of the summer season with activities and events to create sun-drenched memories



**TEA ON THE LAWN**

**There can be little more delightful than taking afternoon tea outside with friends and family. It is always made that bit more splendid when laid out 'properly' with a tablecloth, ceramic tableware, as well as wine glasses and Champagne flutes for sipping a cool, crisp drink. A pretty punch bowl and ladle sets a generous and convivial mood. Create a glorious tall centrepiece with a cake stand — this one is particularly show-stopping with its dainty hanging baskets that make a handful of seasonal fruits look a most tempting treat. It is worth remembering that a fold-up trestle table can be completely disguised with a white tablecloth, making it easy to transport a long table to a secluded spot for an uninterrupted idyllic view.**

*Al fresco Wild Strawberry tableware, starting from £20 for a bowl, Wedgwood* ▶





## LET THE GAMES BEGIN

Garden games are not just a method for entertaining children during the summer holidays, they are also a lovely way to connect all the generations of a family and bring everyone together. Laughter will fill a Sunday afternoon, a garden party or a picnic as children and adults race around the rounders pitch, fast as the wind, or cheers rise as a croquet ball sails to the peg point. Even if older relatives cannot take part in the activities, they can watch and join in with encouraging words from the sidelines. If hosting a party, find out a few interesting historic snippets about traditional lawn games as a fun way to tempt reluctant participants to play. For example, Southampton bowling green is reputed to be one of the oldest in existence, dating from 1299, making the game a grand English tradition. Source more interesting facts at *tradgames.org.uk*. Classic garden games to play in a group include croquet, bowls, skittles and rounders. There are also many indoor games, such as chess, draughts and Jenga, that have been recreated in giant form to make them suitable for the outdoors. These will appeal to both young and old family members and a wide selection can be found at Traditional Garden Games.







CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE PAGE

Easy to carry games sets can be transported to any outdoor setting, such as a lovely riverside spot, which is a little further afield than the end of the garden. *Rounders set, £18; boules set, £20; croquet set, £40; garden skittles set, £40, all Laura Ashley*

Create an adult haven to escape to with this grown up fabric hideaway. To make this shady structure use garden bamboo canes, string and lengths of linen sheeting. This beautiful scene is taken from the recipe book *Flavours of Summer* published by Ryland Peters & Small.

Decamp to the garden and stay outside for as long as possible with atmospheric lanterns. *Set of two lattice Kamla Garden Lanterns, £19.95, Red Lilly*

Cover home-made cake and keep the bugs away. *Black Toast Glass Comport Dome, £64.95, Emma Bridgewater*

## PARTY IN THE GARDEN

The sun puts his hat on at his own discretion, which, even in high summer, cannot always be predicted or relied upon, therefore garden parties often end up being a spontaneous, casual affair and guests' invitations are confirmed shortly after the weather for the day is apparent. An informal gathering can still be wonderfully organised and appealing, preparation being key. Presenting a smorgasbord of picnic treats on platters will make it easy to rush inside if an unexpected shower arrives. Invest in hardy garden tableware – such as Oka's rustic rattan cutlery carry, woven underplates and napkin basket, which will encourage annual summertime get-togethers – for maximum use. Not everyone will want to unfurl on a sunlounger for hours on end, so make nearby shade comfortable with outdoor cushions, Not on the High Street has a wide selection. Here an inviting 'fabric cove' has open sides to keep a sociable mood. Along with games, a solar powered DAB digital radio could provide a summery soundtrack. Keep the children's area stocked with Jamie Oliver's basil lemonade (recipe on *jamieoliver.com)* and assemble charming places for little ones to hide with tents from the Great Little Trading Company.







**ABOVE** Home-made rose bath salts make a thoughtful gift. Other seasonal summer flowers that can be used to make scented bath salts include jasmine and lavender.

## ROSE SALTS AND SUGARS

Organic rose petals are a lovely fragrant ingredient that can be used to capture summer in a bottle with hardly any effort and certainly no difficult techniques to master. You can use dried or fresh organic petals. To make a soothing blend of bath salts simply mix 136g of Epsom salts with 64g of baking soda and then layer inside a jar with rose petals. To intensify the scent you can add a few drops of rose essential oil when you mix the salt and soda together. Alternatively, to create rose sugar take a handful of organic rose petals and remove the white part of the petals, then layer in a jar with sugar. This mix will keep in a dry store cupboard for several weeks and will add a lovely flavour to edible treats such as home-made biscuits and herbal tea.

## PRESSING FLOWERS

The art of pressing flowers was a popular pastime in the Victorian era. For those of us who love the idea but wonder how we might use pressed flowers, the finished results make an elegant personal touch to decorate summer garden party invites. Equally, how lovely to create home-made wrapping paper, tied with matching ribbon. Search for pressed flowers on Pinterest and you will find several step-by-step guides explaining how to adorn plain white pillar



*A thing of beauty is a joy forever: its loveliness increases*

John Keats, 1795-1821, taken from the poem *Endymion*, Book I [A Thing of Beauty is a Joy Forever]






candles with pressed flowers – a pretty way to enhance an al fresco evening supper. Summertime provides rich floral pickings, so choose a variety of blooms in different sizes and shapes and be creative with designs. When you pick the flowers make sure they are dry and spotless. Flowers can be pressed using a traditional flower press or between the pages of a heavy book, but be sure to use parchment paper so it does not absorb the print, and place something heavy on top. Flowers should take around a week or two to press, although they may take a little longer depending on the size of the blooms being used.

## GROWING EDIBLE FLOWERS

Minimal culinary skills are needed to delicately garnish a fresh salad with pansy petals. From salads to tarts, flowers add complementary flavour to a wide variety of dishes and by growing your own it is possible to enjoy the beautiful blooms before harvesting. Obviously, it is very important to be clean and cautious when growing edible flowers and check diners' possible allergies. Thompson and Morgan has a helpful guide on its blog, visit *thompson-morgan.com/edible-flowers*. For beginners, sunflowers, sweet peas, marigolds and fuchsias are suggested. If possible, try to pick the flowers on the day of eating for the best results.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP** Blogger Laura Goble helpfully explains how to use a traditional flower press on her blog. *wemadethishome.blogspot.co.uk*

Goble pressed an assortment of flowers arranged in different ways. *Flower press, £9, Laura Ashley*

A pretty and practical pinny helps to protect clothes when collecting flowers. *Artisan Pinny in rose, £58, The Linen Works*



## TUTTI FRUTTI SEMIFREDDO WITH CANDIED CITRUS

On a hot day this *semifreddo* will slip down as a cool treat. There is no need for an ice-cream maker and, once frozen, it can be turned out on a serving plate and sliced or served scooped into bowls, as pictured here. Recipe taken from *Flavours of Summer,* published by Ryland Peters & Small.

Serves 6–8
3 eggs
2 egg yolks
100g caster/granulated sugar
Iced water
500ml double cream
3 tablespoons candied citrus (see recipe below), finely chopped
Biscuits, to serve

- Combine the eggs, yolks and sugar in a heatproof bowl and place over a pot of simmering water.
- Whisk the mixture with an electric hand whisk on a high speed for about 5 minutes, until it turns into pale yellow ribbons and has thickened.
- Turn off the heat and place the bowl with the egg mixture over a bowl filled with iced water to cool.
- Pour the cream into a large bowl and beat until thick, and soft peaks form.
- Fold the cooled egg mixture through the cream until thoroughly incorporated.
- Fold in the candied fruit and pour into a clean bowl.
- Cover with plastic wrap/clingfilm and freeze until firm. Scoop and serve with biscuits.



## CANDIED CITRUS

This delicious treat is a simple way to add a sweet tang and additional flourish to summer desserts.

6 lemons or 4 oranges or 8 limes
700g caster sugar
Baking sheet, sprinkled with caster sugar

- Peel the fruit into strips, making sure you do not get any pith on the peel. Cut the peel into thin matchsticks and set aside.
- Bring a small pan of water to the boil and drop the peel into it. Cook the peel for 10 minutes.
- Drain the peel and repeat the process. This will get rid of any bitterness in the citrus peel.
- Bring the sugar and 700ml of water to a boil over a medium–high heat. Reduce the heat and simmer for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the sugar has completely dissolved.
- Add the peel and bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to a rapid simmer. Continue to cook for 20 minutes more, brushing down the sides with a pastry brush as necessary.
- Turn off the heat and allow the peel to cool in the syrup for at least an hour.
- Preheat the oven to 120°C/250°F/gas mark ½.
- Remove the peel from the pan with a slotted spoon, shaking any excess syrup back into the pan.
- Toss the peel in the sugar on the prepared baking sheet, then bake in the preheated oven for 45 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool completely before serving.
- It is possible to store the peel in an airtight container for up to six months. ■

**FEATURE** SUZANNA BALL **PHOTOGRAPHS** P110 FABRIC HIDEAWAY © RYLAND PETERS & SMALL. P112 HOMEMADE ROSE BATH SALTS © STOCKFOOD / RAIDER, PETER. P113 FLOWER PRESS SHOT © LAURA GOBLE. P114 SEMIFREDDO AND CANDIED CITRUS © RYLAND PETERS & SMALL

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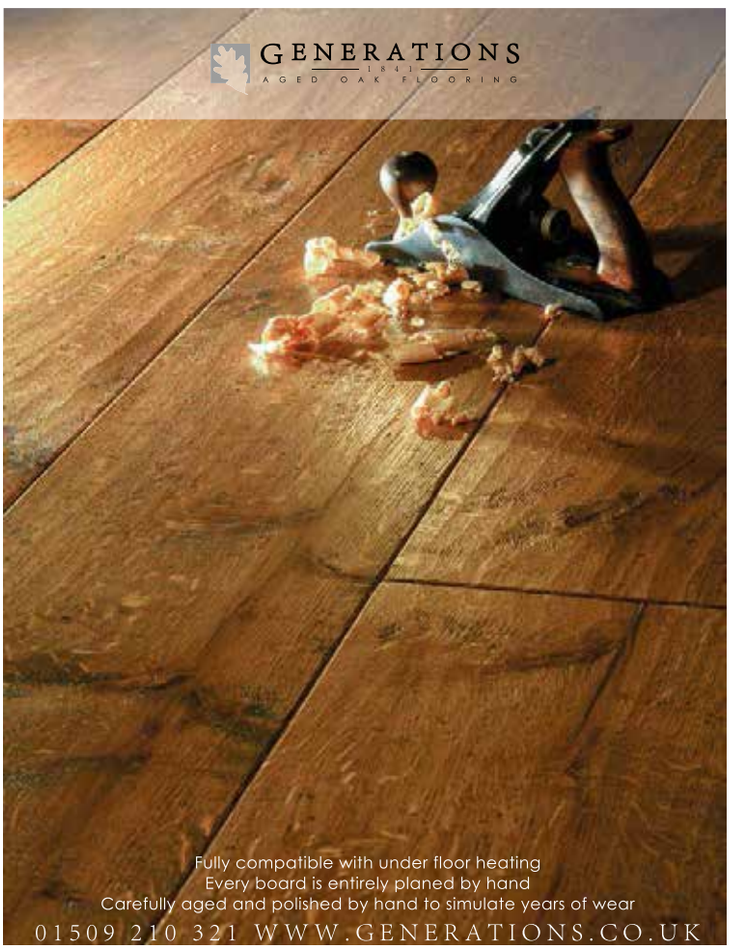
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# INFUSED WITH *Sunshine*

A truly taste-tingling collection of sweet and savoury recipes that bring out the rich and various flavours of all manner of fruits and berries



## BERRIES WITH ROSE, CARDAMOM AND BLACK PEPPER SYRUP

Dried rose petals are now widely available in larger supermarkets, online or in Middle Eastern grocers. However, if you happen to grow deeply scented roses in your garden then a handful of fresh or dried petals would be a really rather lovely addition to this fruit compote. As always when using fresh flowers, ensure that they are clean, bug-free and not sprayed with chemicals. Homemade vanilla ice cream or a bowl of crème fraîche, Greek yoghurt or softly whipped double cream would be perfect alongside this dessert.

Serves 4-6
125g caster sugar
200ml cold water
A good pinch of dried rose petals (food grade, see page 18)
½ tsp black peppercorns
3 cardamom pods
Juice of ½ lemon
400g strawberries
150g redcurrants
300g raspberries
5 fresh figs, washed

• Tip the sugar into a saucepan, add the cold water and the rose petals. Using a pestle and mortar, very lightly crush the black peppercorns and cardamom pods and add to the pan. Set the pan over a low-medium heat to gently dissolve the sugar. Bring to the boil, reduce to a simmer and continue to cook gently for 2 minutes. Remove the syrup from the heat, add the lemon juice and leave to cool and infuse with the petals and spices for 2 hours.
• Hull and halve the strawberries and tip into a serving bowl. Using a fork, strip the redcurrants from their stems directly into the bowl. Add the raspberries and figs, cut into slim wedges.
• Strain the syrup over the fruit, stir gently to combine and leave for 30 minutes to an hour in order to allow the flavours to mingle before serving.



## RASPBERRY TARTS

Elegant enough to be served at the smartest afternoon tea party, especially garnished with edible flowers.

Makes 12
For the pastry:
200g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
40g icing sugar, plus extra for dusting
Pinch of salt
125g unsalted butter, diced
1 medium egg yolk
2 tbsp iced water
2 tsp lemon juice

For the filling:
350g raspberries, plus extra to serve
100-125g caster sugar, plus 2 tbsp
A splash of water or lemon juice
1 medium egg, beaten
3 medium egg yolks, beaten
125ml double cream or crème fraîche, plus extra to serve,
6 tbsp seedless raspberry jelly or jam

• Tip the flour into the bowl of a food processor, add the icing sugar and salt and pulse briefly to combine. Add the butter and pulse until just incorporated. Tip the mixture into a mixing bowl and make a well in the middle. Add the egg yolk, iced water and lemon juice then, using a round-bladed knife, cut through the mixture to combine the ingredients and bring the dough together. Use your hands to knead the dough lightly. Form into a neat disk. Cover with clingfilm and chill for 2 hours.
• For the filling: place the raspberries in a small saucepan with the 2 tablespoons caster sugar and a splash of water or lemon juice. Cook over a low heat for about 6 minutes until the fruit is very soft. Push through a fine-mesh nylon sieve into a bowl. Add the remaining sugar to sweeten to taste; cool for 10 minutes. Add the whole beaten egg and egg yolks and stir into the purée with the cream or crème fraîche and whisk to combine. Strain through the sieve into a bowl and set aside.
• Roll the pastry out to a thickness of no more than 2mm. Stamp out 12cm discs from the pastry with a cutter and use to line 12 tartlet tins. Prick the bases and chill the tart cases for 15 minutes whilst you preheat the oven to 170°C/gas mark 3.
• Line each tart case with foil and fill with baking beans. Arrange on a baking tray and bake for 10-12 minutes until just golden. Remove the foil and baking beans and divide the filling between the tart cases. Return to the oven for a further 12-13 minutes until the filling has set. Leave until completely cold, then chill until firm.
• Warm the raspberry jelly in a small saucepan and brush over the top of each tart. Decorate with a small dollop of cream, extra raspberries and edible flowers.



## PEACH AND BUFFALO MOZZARELLA SALAD WITH PISTACHIO PESTO

As with all simple salads, success lies in using the absolute best, most flavoursome produce you can find, so save this for high summer when the peaches are juicy and the tomatoes have been warmed by the sun. You can also make it with burrata cheese if you prefer, but it can be a little too creamy.

Serves 4
4 ripe peaches, washed, dried, halved and stoned
1 Lebanese cucumber or ½ regular cucumber
6 heirloom tomatoes, preferably mixed colours
A good handful of wild rocket
2 x 125g balls buffalo mozzarella
A handful of purple basil
3 tbsp aged balsamic vinegar
3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
Freshly ground black pepper

For the pistachio pesto:
50g shelled unsalted pistachios, lightly toasted
1 garlic clove, peeled
30g flat-leaf parsley
A dash of lemon juice
100ml extra virgin or pistachio oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

• First make the pesto. Tip the lightly toasted pistachios into the bowl of a mini processor and whizz until finely chopped. Add the garlic and parsley and whizz again to combine. Then add the lemon juice and half of the oil, season well with salt and black pepper and blend until almost smooth. Add the remaining oil and whizz once more. Set aside for 30 minutes for all of the flavours to mingle; adjust the seasoning to taste.

• Cut the peaches into wedges, the cucumber into bite-sized pieces, and slice the tomatoes. Arrange the rocket on each plate and top with peaches, cucumber and tomatoes. Tear the mozzarella into pieces and divide between the plates. Spoon the pesto over each salad and scatter with the basil. Finish with a drizzle of the balsamic vinegar and extra virgin olive oil and a good grinding of black pepper.



## APPLE AND SMOKED TROUT SALAD WITH COBNUTS

Salads with a bit of snap and crunch are delicious, especially if they are being served as a main course. With a splash of colour and a zippy dressing, this salad meets those criteria but needs to be made with fresh vegetables.

Serves 4
A handful of cobnuts or hazelnuts
1 medium candy-striped or pink beetroot
¼ cucumber
2 crisp, sharp apples, such as granny smith, cored
6 radishes
2 celery sticks
250g smoked trout fillets
Juice of ½ lemon
5 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 tsp grainy Dijon mustard
Salt and ground black pepper
3 tbsp salad cress

- Crack open the nutshells, pick out the nuts and roughly chop.
- Peel the beetroot and slice it wafer thin, using a mandolin if you can, repeat with the cucumber, apple and radishes, then cut the celery into fine matchsticks.
- Arrange the vegetables and apples on serving plates and flake the smoked trout alongside or over the top.
- In a small bowl, lightly whisk together the lemon juice, olive oil and Dijon mustard, then season well with salt and black pepper. Drizzle the dressing over the salads, scatter with the salad cress and serve.

## VANILLA AND THYME BAKED APRICOTS

The fresh apricot season seems to come and go in a flash, so make the most of them while they are around. More often than not apricots in the shops are under-ripe and disappointing when eaten raw. They fare much better when shown a little heat, a little love and something sweet to bring out their flavour and juiciness. This is the simplest and most delicious way of doing so, and even less-than-impressive apricots come alive when baked. Serve warm rather than hot, with the juices poured over and with a good slug of thick double cream. Or save for breakfast and top with natural yogurt and granola – preferably homemade, of course. It is one of those recipes where you don't need to be too specific – add a little more honey, if you prefer and maybe a cinnamon stick, or even a handful of lightly toasted flaked almonds or pine nuts for crunch.

**Serves 3-4**
**10-12 ripe apricots**
**4 strips of unwaxed lemon peel**
**Juice of ½ lemon**
**1 vanilla pod**
**3 sprigs of thyme**
**2-3 tbsp clear honey**
**2 tbsp cold water**
**Chilled double cream, to serve**

- Preheat the oven to 190°C/gas mark 5. Wash the apricots and pat dry. Cut in half, remove the stones and arrange the fruit, cut side uppermost, in a single layer in a ceramic ovenproof dish. Tuck the strips of lemon peel amongst the fruit and drizzle over the lemon juice. Using the point of a knife, slice the vanilla pod in half down its length and nestle both halves and the thyme sprigs around the apricots. Finally, drizzle over the honey and cold water.
- Bake on the middle shelf of the oven for 20-25 minutes until tender, basting the apricots with the resulting juices halfway through cooking. The cooking timings can vary depending on the size and ripeness of the apricots, so keep an eye on them after 20 minutes, as you want the fruit to still hold its shape without becoming overly soft and mushy.
- Serve warm with cold double cream.





## PEACH SHRUB

Shrub is the name given to either a vinegared fruit syrup or to alcohol that fruit has been steeped in. For this recipe we are sticking with the former. The vinegar is there as an acidic back note to the vibrant peachy syrup. Shrubs are now experiencing something of a renaissance and are deliciously refreshing when diluted with soda water or added to cocktails. When making a shrub, it is of the utmost importance that you use ripe fruit, as you need to extract maximum flavour from the fruit and anything under-ripe won't have the necessary oomph and juice.

**Makes 1 large bottle**
**6 ripe yellow-fleshed peaches, washed, halved and stoned**
**350g caster sugar**
**300ml white balsamic vinegar**

- Slice the fruit directly into a large Kilner or other preserving jar. Add the sugar and mix to combine.
- Cover and refrigerate for 2 days, stirring twice a day until the fruit is super soft and very juicy.
- Add the vinegar, stir well, cover and return to the fridge for another day, again stirring twice.
- Tip the whole thing through a fine-mesh nylon sieve into a bowl and leave for a couple of hours to ensure that every last drop of juice drips through into the bowl. Do not be tempted to push the fruit, otherwise you will end up with a cloudy pulp rather than clear syrup.
- Finally, pass the resulting liquid through a clean muslin cloth before decanting into a sterilised bottle. It will keep for up to 1 month in the fridge. ■



*The featured recipes have been taken from* Summer Berries and Autumn Fruit *by Annie Rigg, with photographs by Tara Fisher* (£19.99 Kyle Books).



Although technically a small market town – permission to hold a regular market, and thus official 'borough' status was granted in the thirteenth century – with a population under 2,000, Northleach has the feel of a bustling village, with its butcher's shop, a bakery and three pubs.

# *In search of the* PERFECT ENGLISH VILLAGE

A shop, a school, a church and a pub – these are often cited as the essential ingredients of village life. But why do some villages thrive whilst others simply become commuter dormitories? We scour the countryside for that elusive treasure – the perfect English village



Rows of picturesque stone cottages, a tranquil countryside setting, an ancient church, a welcoming pub, and perhaps a well-tended green with a pond or a cricket pavilion... The quintessential English village is many people's idea of the perfect place to live.

A recent study in Country Life magazine found that 80 per cent of city dwellers dream of a country lifestyle, and figures from the Office of National Statistics bear this out, with certain parts of the country – notably East Anglia and the North East – seeing rural population growth over the last few years outstripping that of the regional towns and cities.

Despite a sluggish country housing market during the worst years of the credit crunch, with sales of country properties lagging considerably behind a more robust urban market, there are tangible signs that things are beginning to pick up again. "We've just had five years of the worst market anyone can remember," says Robin Gould, director of Prime Purchase, a property-buying agency with regional offices in East Anglia, the Cotswolds and the South West. "But post-election, things are looking very different and growth in the country is predicted to rise by 20 per cent over the next five years." Rupert Marchington of Knight Frank's Cirencester office agrees, although he notes that the type of prospective buyer has changed. "Twenty years ago, the market was very much driven by people relocating for work. There was a great demand for Cotswolds properties from people moving to work in Swindon, which was the fastest-expanding town in Europe at one stage. Now, the market is more discretionary – people don't have to buy, it's a choice. We tend to see more people who are retaining a property in London as well as buyers who have come to the end of their working lives and want to move to a traditional village."

Lindsay Cuthill, head of Savills' Country department says: "Increasingly buyers of country property come with an urban experience, and whilst they might long for views of fields and open countryside, they still want to be within walking distance of designer coffee, a good local pub and boutique shops."

"You need a vibrant pub somewhere between scampi in a basket and a Michelin-star restaurant with a series of guest beers all within walking distance," adds Will Peppitt, also of Savills' Country department. "There needs to be a shop stocking a variety of artisan cheese and organic wines and a good village primary school – it's becoming increasingly fashionable to educate your children locally. The icing on the cake is a train station that gets you to London in less than an hour."

Very few villages tick all these boxes, but one such is Kingham in west Oxfordshire, with its picturesque gothic church, its village shop and collection of mellow stone-and-thatch cottages mainly dating from the 17th and 18th centuries clustered round a picture-postcard-perfect village green – along with two excellent dining pubs (one run by award-winning chef Emily Watkins, the other owned by Lady Bamford of Daylesford fame), a highly regarded independent school and its very own mainline railway station. Although Kingham attracts its share of weekend visitors, there is no sense that this is a 'weekend village', devoid of life during the week. "The Cotswolds is full of weekenders," admits George Barkes of Stacks Property Search. "Pubs such as the Plough and The Wild Rabbit wouldn't survive without them, but there are plenty of thriving villages, too."

Finding the perfect village, of course, is an intensely personal choice, and cannot be simply boiled down to algorithms based on property values and train links. Tracy Kellett of BDI Home Finders – a property-finding agency based in the South East – suggests the two key factors that draw relocators to a village are schools and transport. "Generally speaking, the trigger is a second baby coming along and they want to get out of the city, however in the vast majority of cases, the work is still in town. They will come with a brief for the middle of nowhere, but when you show them the middle of nowhere, it scares the living daylights out of them. In reality, what they want is rural life without the inconvenience: Daylesford Organics and everything they've found in London."

Further afield from London, priorities change: "The North offers fantastic transport links for London commuters, with Crewe railway station offering a journey time of just over 1 hour 30 minutes, whilst



ABOVE Finchingfield in north Essex is a popular choice with its ancient church and central pond surrounded by greens and houses.
OPPOSITE FROM TOP Pretty timber-framed cottages and a number of greens give the village of Clavering a feeling of timeless Englishness, despite the proximity to Stanstead airport. TV chef Jamie Oliver grew up here, and his father still runs one of the village's two pubs. The Cotswolds is peppered with tranquil villages lined with ancient houses built of the local butter-coloured stone.






## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION...

*England's most desirable villages by region*

### EAST ANGLIA TOP NINE

Arkesden, Clavering, Radwinter and Finchingfield, Essex; Hartest, Lavenham and Long Melford, Suffolk; Blakeney and Cley-next-the-Sea, Norfolk

"Arkesden, Clavering, Radwinter and Finchingfield are all picturesque and have pretty painted period and thatched cottages plus some more modern houses, which fit in well with the village architecture. Arkesden and Radwinter are very compact, Clavering has a green and Finchingfield has a central pond surrounded by greens and houses. Extremely pretty, well kept villages always demand a premium especially if they have a pub, shop or Post Office and a school. The village schools in this part of Essex are excellent and are a popular choice with parents."
*David Emberson of Mullucks Wells, north Essex*

"Hartest is one of the prettiest small villages with just a pub, painted houses and a green, where it holds an annual old-fashioned fête. Larger villages are the historic places of Lavenham and Long Melford, which are just as attractive and have more facilities, such as shops and schools. People always aspire to quintessential villages and anywhere with a beautiful green and pretty houses is going to attract the crowds."
*Alex Davis, David Burr, Suffolk*

"Blakeney and Cley-next-the-Sea are two hotspots with beautiful homes in well kept villages with lovely marsh walks down to the beach — and plenty of sailing and fine eating available. Blakeney has a fabulous quay — a magnet for visitors, with plenty of freshly fished crab. Without doubt, attractive villages have properties that sell more quickly and sell for a premium. A stone-built cottage with roses around the door, which stands behind a low wall in a chocolate-box village, ticks the boxes. Here in north Norfolk, this invariably means a traditional fisherman's cottage on the coast, built from the local stone, which can be chalk, flint-stone or carrstone depending upon where along the coast they buy. In recent years, many have been beautifully refurbished; these days it is rare to find one in its original condition. The allure of a pretty cottage in a pretty coastal village seems to have endured through the generations."
*Ben Marchbank, Bedfords, Norfolk*

### MIDLANDS HOTSPOTS

Colston Bassett, Nottinghamshire; Navenby, Lincolnshire; Norton-in-Hales, Shropshire

"The Shropshire Union Canal passes through Christleton and there is a large pond situated by the village widely known as 'Christleton Pit', which attracts children from the village and surrounding areas due to the abundance of wildlife, swans and ducks. Christleton boasts one of the best state high schools in the county, which makes the village particularly sought after for many families. Its close proximity to Chester makes it easily commutable to both Manchester and London."
*Andrew Peratt, head of residential, Savills in the North*

"A small, charming village in the Vale of Belvoir in south east Nottinghamshire, Colston Bassett lies on the River Smite, close to the Leicestershire border. Lying on the River Smite, the village has a population of just 225 people. Famed for its dairy, which opened in 1913, Colston Bassett is one of only five places permitted to make Stilton cheese. Opt for a spot










CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Arkesden is often cited as one of Essex's prettiest villages. It was home to the writer C Gordon Glover, author of The Parish Pump column in *The Country Gentleman's Magazine* in the 1960s.

Brightly painted cottages encircling a broad village green give the Suffolk village of Hartest a distinctive identity.

The Cheshire village of Tattenhall is recorded in the Domesday Book.

The unspoilt village of Wherwell lies in Hampshire's sought-after Test valley.

Half-timbered houses surround a large pond known locally as Christleton Pit in Christleton, Cheshire.

Chester, Wilmslow and York railway stations all offer journey times of less than two hours," comments Andrew Perratt, head of residential for Savills in the North.

"Despite the uncomplicated commute into London, the North offers natural beauty in all its easily accessible glory, including five national parks. The countryside is always on your doorstep, but it's likely that one of the region's many great cities will also be conveniently close, too. The biggest draw, though, has got to be price and affordability; the North offers endless opportunities to purchase incredible properties in some of the UK's most sought-after villages for a fraction of the price of their southern equivalent."

"The nature of working life has changed," explains Robin Gould, whose property-finding business is based in the South West. "Most of my clients are not people who get on the train every morning. Rural broadband is key. People come to Dorset because of the schools, but it's also about the countryside and coast, without the pressures of the commuter areas. The Test valley is a bit of a hotspot – Stockbridge is a lovely little town and a focal point, and the villages along the valley are particularly desirable and sought-after. Further west, the villages around Taunton is also somewhere we're expecting to see significant growth. It's on the main Paddington line and the train service is likely to get even better over the next few years."

Along with young families, retirees are also a significant sector of the relocation market. According to Age UK, recent research reveals that almost 60 per cent of over-55s find the idea of retiring to a rural area appealing, with one in three actually considering it as a serious option. "A lot of people with happy memories of a beautiful place look to retire to an area they used to holiday in," suggests Julian Rich of national property-search consultants Garrington, whose area covers the counties of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire. Grassington in the Yorkshire Dales is particularly attractive, because it has all the facilities of a small market town, along with a National Park setting and fabulous views. Smaller villages such as Kettlewell, Appletreewick and Burnsall and the villages on the northern edge of Harrogate are also sought-after "Although these tend to be less attractive to people who need to commute to work in Leeds or York," he adds, "because it's a bit of a trek." There are downsides, though; planning restrictions in conservation areas and National Parks can be somewhat limited, and steep prices are buoyed by strong demand and a finite stock of houses.









of cricket at the local cricket club, or relax at The Martin's Arms; a pub set in a Grade II listed building, which won Nottinghamshire's Dining Pub of the Year in 2012, 2013 and 2014. With good links to Newark, Grantham, Leicester and Nottingham, the village offers fantastic opportunities for commuters, with a train journey from Newark to London taking just 1 hour, 30 minutes."
*Chris Charlton, head of residential, Savills Nottingham*

"Located just 8 miles from Lincoln city centre, Navenby could be classed as a 'dream village', with its own butchers, bakery and several other shops. In 2011, Navenby was named as the 'Best Value Village' in England following a national survey."
*Rupert Fisher, head of residential, Savills Lincoln:*

"A picturesque village located in north Shropshire, just four miles north east of Market Drayton, Norton-in-Hales is within easy commuting distance of Crewe, Newport, Stoke, Telford and Shrewsbury. Stafford railway station, with its fast London connection, is just a 30-minute drive. The village green lies between the church and the village's lively gastro pub, the Hinds Head. With a vibrant community feel and a thriving primary school, Norton-in-Hales also boasts excellent sporting facilities for tennis, cricket and crown green bowls."
*Tony Morris-Eyton, head of residential at Savills Telford*

## NORTHERN DELIGHTS

Christleton, Tattenhall, Tarporley and Prestbury, Cheshire; Terrington and Appleton Roebuck, North Yorkshire

"Tattenhall is a small but increasingly popular village with a real community feel. With a really good primary school and an easy commute into both Chester and Manchester, the village is popular with families and young professionals alike. Journey times into London from local railway stations also make Tattenhall a desirable base, with Crewe station offering a journey time of just 1.5 hours and the journey from Chester to London taking 2 hours."

"One of the larger villages in the heart of the Cheshire countryside, Tarporley is home to a host of village shops, restaurants and pubs. There's a country market on the first Saturday of every month, and they also hold the Tarporley Carnival every July. Tarporley High School is considered one of the best in the county, regularly receiving outstanding Ofsted reports."

"Sitting between Wilmslow and Macclesfield, the popular village of Prestbury is ideally located, offering both convenience and calm with an attractive historic centre and many listed buildings including a Grade I listed Church. The village has its own mainline railway station, which goes into Manchester and has direct links into London. The village lies 1.5 miles north of Macclesfield, where the train journey time to London Euston is 1 hour, 45 minutes. In addition, it lies just 30 minutes away from Manchester airport. The village is popular with families due to its excellent schools."

"Terrington is a large village in the Ryedale district of North Yorkshire. It lies in the Howardian Hills, an area of outstanding natural beauty. It is a very pretty, former estate village on the edge of the Castle Howard estate. There are a number of good primary and secondary schools nearby, and York is approximately 30 minutes away, from where you can hop on a train to London in less than 2 hours."

"Appleton Roebuck is located 9 miles south west of York, making it convenient for travel to York, Leeds and London. The area boasts a selection of good schools and has a thriving community."
*Andrew Perratt, head of residential for Savills in the North*

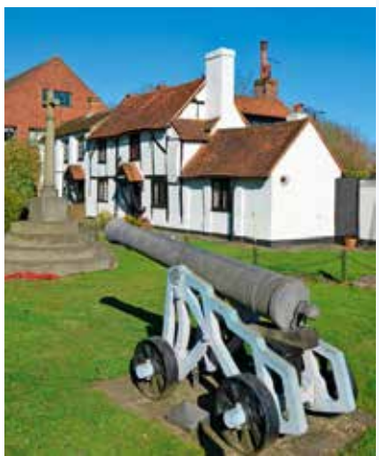
## WESTERN ASPIRATIONS

Northleach, Gloucestersire; Sherston, Wiltshire; Kingham, Oxfordshire; Tysoe Warwickshire

"A small market town such as Northleach has a lot to offer, and Sherston in Wiltshire is a classic, and very high on people's agenda. It has several pubs, a post office and a village shop, and it's large enough to have a bit of a cross-section of life. It's not far from Westonbirt and the Cotswold Water Park. What people are invariably looking for is a community."
*Rupert Marchington, Knight Frank, Cirencester*







CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Charming flint cottages line the streets of Blakeney, which lies in the north Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Chobham in Surrey has a thriving high street. Proximity to the mainline station in nearby Woking makes this a popular choice for commuters.

Wtih an idyllic setting astride the River Wharfe in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, Burnsall is well placed for the excellent services of nearby Grassington and boasts a Grade II listed school.

Tracy Kellett, however, reveals that she sometimes turns down clients with unrealistic dreams of retiring to the country. "I counsel people quite heavily," she reveals. "They will have a lot of time on their hands, and will need to make friends and find activities to fill their lives."

A particularly popular place with retirees is the charming village of Cerne Abbas, which nestles in the Dorset Downs under the shadow of the notorious Cerne Abbas Giant. Despite the fact that the transport connections are not particularly great: ("You may lose the will to live if you need to get to London regularly on the train," admits Robin Gould) and there's a higher-than-average age profile, there are three pubs, a tea room, a doctor's surgery, a school and a shop, and there is a huge variety of clubs and societies to choose from for its 600-or-so inhabitants. "We have an annual music festival with world-class musicians, and last year, there were 28 gardens open in our annual Open Gardens. There are lots of committed people who make things happen," explains one resident who prefers not to be named, but who came here to retire 15 years ago. "It ticks all the boxes. You come here because it's such a pretty village, but you stay because it's such a vibrant community." ■

"Kingham is a classic example. It's a cracking village, because there's everything there, but consequently, it's very expensive. It's the centre of the Chipping Norton set. It's got the Wild Rabbit, which is owned by Lady Bamford, the Plough, which has Emily Watkins, Daylesford itself is just outside the village and Kingham public school is just up the road. Tysoe, in south Warwickshire is a great village, too. It has a pub, a butcher, a doctor, a hairdresser and a school – a shop is a big thing, and when that goes, the others inevitably tend to follow. Tysoe is a really active village with lots of things going on in the village hall

"In today's market, the prospect of rural isolation is less seductive. Buyers fleeing their urban lifestyles are seeking a more gentle change and turning to small market towns and larger villages that still have the sense of community that a lot of the bigger towns have lost whilst remaining in tune with the surrounding countryside. A mainline railway station can change the dynamics and lead to too many commuters taking away the innate localness of the town. If there is a railway station, it should have local rather than main connections."

*George Barkes, Stacks Property Search*

### SOUTH EASTERN STARS

**Chobham, Surrey; Egerton and Chilham, Kent**

"Good-sized villages on the edge of flourishing market towns on the train line to Waterloo – Winchester, Guildford and Woking are popular with my clients. Chobham is particularly nice, with pretty properties and a good high street."

*Tracy Kellett, BDI Home Finders property search*

"Egerton, which lies on the rim of a hill, has some of the loveliest views across the Weald of Kent together with good facilities, including a railway station. Chilham is lovely, too, with its famous medieval square and castle. Undoubtedly, the biggest draw around here is the high-speed rail link into London. The housing stock is attractive, too, with a profusion of yeoman farmhouses, often half-timbered and built from the local red-clay brick."

*Edward Church, Strutt & Parker's Canterbury office*

### SOUTH WESTERN DRAWS

**Cerne Abbas, Dorset; Sherrington, Broad Chalke and Bowerchalke, Wiltshire; Thorverton, Silverton, Brampford Speke and Mamhead, Devon**

"Dorset is probably one of the loveliest counties in southern England. People come here because of the schools, but it's also about the coast, a slice of rural life without a lot of the pressures of the more populous commuter areas. Villages around Blandford, Sherborne, Shaftsbury and Salisbury are very popular. Cerne Abbas is very, very pretty, whilst in Wiltshire, Sherrington in the Wylye Valley along with Broad Chalke and Bowerchalke are also highly desirable locations."

*Robin Gould, director of Prime Purchase*

"Different villages have different cachets, depending on your lifestyle. Villages such as Thorverton, Silverton and Brampford Speke in the Exe Valley are particularly popular, with good pubs, good access to the centre of Exeter as well as the motorway, and they are away from the flight path, too, so they're quiet. On the other side of Exeter, you have Mamhead, which has a good community and is always popular."

*Oliver Custance Baker, Strutt & Parker, Exeter*

**FEATURE** JILL SHEARER **PHOTOGRAPHS** ALAMY, P122 COTSWOLDS.COM, P124 VISIT ESSEX, P125 (BOTTOM) VISIT ENGLAND/COTSOWLDS.COM/NICK TURNER, P126 VISIT ENGLAND/VISIT ESSEX, P128 (TOP) VISIT ENGLAND/IAIN LEWIS



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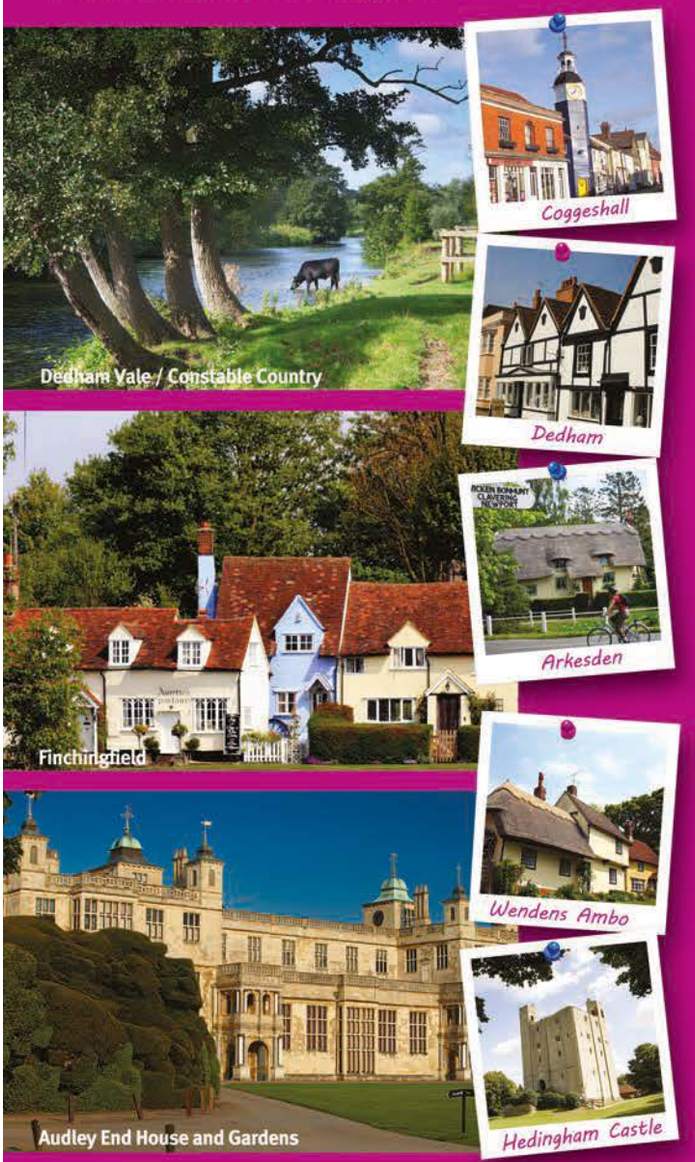
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With our incognito columnist otherwise engaged on a yoga retreat, Mr M steps into the breach and recounts the benefits and pitfalls of being left to his own devices

# *The art of* HOUSE HUSBANDRY

Mrs M had such plans for me whilst she is away in Deia, watching pop stars cavorting on the beach and brushing up on her yoga. She practised in the drawing room in the run-up to her annual two weeks away from me, and I was surprised on occasions to wander in to find her in some most unusual positions.

Her best-laid plans, however, were scuppered on day one when Hugo, an old chum of mine, popped round to show off his new gundog puppy, Nigel. It was undeniably sweet, and I grew fonder of it when it munched its way through the fourteen A4 sheets of instructions left by Mrs M and then peed on the confetti-like remnants.

Each page had covered one day of her absence in yoga paradise whilst I would have to cope home alone because – worst of all – Maggie, our long-suffering housekeeper, had forsaken me in my hour of need and seized the opportunity to escape to Yorkshire to meet her new grand-daughter, Charlotte, named, I was told, after the new Royal baby.

As best I remember, Mrs M's extensive *plan de bataille* covered such areas as what I should cook each evening (seemingly regardless of my appetite or preference), how often I needed to vacuum the tumble drier filter, when and how to wash her 1,000 thread-count cotton sheets and the silk pillowcase designed to keep her wrinkles at bay, and when I should polish the silver in the unlikely event the Reverend Carmichael might risk a second visit.

My father used to say "why do today what you can put off to tomorrow?" so I followed this sage advice for the first half of my fortnight of freedom. Day one saw Hugo and Nigel joining me to watch county cricket on the television in my snug before adjourning to The Crown for a pint or two. On the walk back, we procured a take-away from the excellent Taj Mahal in the village and broke poppadoms together on the Persian rug in the sitting room with a rather messy toast of vintage port to Mrs M.

Rather than going to the effort of making up the spare room, I allowed Hugo to sleep in the lap of luxury in Mrs M's bedroom. It was, I admit, a mistake, but surely any washing machine worth its salt would cope. To be certain no hint of *eau de l'homme* would remain, I turned the temperature to its highest setting and threw in three washing tablets and a dash of something called Stain Away. With its impressive vivid pink packaging adorned with numerous symbols, such as those one sees warning of radiation leakage, it was sure to do a thorough job.

Ninety minutes later, Mrs M's bed sheets and silk pillowcase resembled something a magician might pull from his coat pocket, and I wasted much of the afternoon on the internet trying to find replacements. They are due to arrive the day before Mrs M's return.

The bedlinen mishap was, I told myself, a lesson and I would learn from it. There is method in Mrs M's madness and – when I am romantically inclined toward she who must be feared and respected – I can accept and admire that she does run a tight ship.

To this end, I instructed the gardener to hide the key to the padlock on the door to the shed where he and I have been known to waste many a boozy hour ▶

**BELOW RIGHT**
Mr M's notebook is more usually required for scribbling down racing tips gleaned when out on a ride, but was called in to action to keep track of household maintenance whilst Mrs M was away on holiday.



and instead to do some work. At this time of the year, I told him, anything not in flower is surely a weed. Miguel raised the question of autumn perennials Mrs M had ordered him to plant for a "good show later in the year", but his English was poor, and I was determined to impress her with pristine beds and flawless borders. "Be bold, my good man, and free us from the tyranny of weeds."

On something of a roll, I also resolved to surprise my beloved by tackling some of the jobs even she – with her endless lists and her decades of dictatorial housewifery – has not considered a priority. Chief amongst these, from my perspective, was the parlous state of the pantry and refrigerator. Neither is replete with the finer things in life, including fruit cake, ice cream, wafer cones, the most fiery barbecue sauces known to man, and those incongruous but delicious snacks that look just like twigs.

Mrs M is loyal to one supermarket and I respected her wishes by logging on with them to do some online shopping. Luckily, I found an entire section of products marked as 'essential', so – to be safe – I clicked to be sent one of each of these.

Next, I was determined to tackle a small indentation in the parquet flooring in the hallway, just inside the front door, where – at 3.45pm on Sunday, 21 April 1998 – I dropped a seven iron when an unusually frisky Mrs M greeted me in just her nightdress and a pair of Wellingtons. I see that indentation every time I walk in; an imperfection that taunts me, mocks me as a man. A man incapable of rectifying such a tiny, but derisive flaw.

The first stage went well; the industrial sander I found in one of the outbuildings removing generations of varnish in an instant. Next, I squeezed out a little wood filler and, finally, a little elbow grease and some fine-grade sandpaper saw the indentation smoothed to perfection. Miguel then secured an old tin of varnish from the local DIY outlet and I left him to finish off.

I have tried every day since to convince myself that the circle of near-black gloss varnish at the site of the repair is barely perceptible against the restrained, biscuit-coloured stain of the rest of the hallway. I have failed and, upon her return, I can only hope Mrs M is not that cognisant of the strategically placed plant pot one must now negotiate when entering the hall.

Perhaps if I mark her return from two weeks of yoga by adopting the tree posture and greeting her with a smile and a quiet '*Namaste*' I will get away with it. ■



**LEFT** The marbled design of this silk bedlinen makes for an enticing choice, whatever the reason for replacing old with new. *Adele silk bedlinen, from £69 for a pillowcase, Gingerlily*



## EFFECTIVE HOME REMEDIES

### Help problems disappear with these useful resources

#### SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS

A tad concerned about lingering odours from the take-away Hugo and I consumed in the sitting room, I decided to investigate how best to add a subtle natural fragrance to a room without resorting to those ghastly and overpowering air fresheners. My research led me to Cologne & Cotton and their Compagnie De Provence Mediterranean Diffuser, £24, which has notes of cyclamen, lily, musk, vanilla and patchouli. That seems to have all bases covered. cologneandcotton.com




#### CURING A FATAL FLOOR

In my heart, I know it is only a matter of time before Mrs M becomes angrily aware of the botched repair job carried out to the parquet flooring in the hall. With this in mind, I have a back-up plan in the shape of The British Wood Flooring Company. Based in Grayshott in Surrey, but offering a nationwide service, they specialise in the installation, refurbishment and finishing of all types of wooden flooring, including reclaimed and antique floors. After sanding, floors are finished with stains, waxes or hard wax oils to offer degrees of protection. britishwoodflooring.co.uk



#### SLEEP ON IT

Mrs M is insistent that she will sleep on nothing but a fine silk pillowcase. Apparently silk, unlike cotton, does not absorb moisture from the skin and hair and therefore helps keep facial lines at bay. This design from Gingerlily is seamless and is made from the finest mulberry silk. It is priced at £49, is naturally hypoallergenic and resistant to dust mites. I also love that it is called the Pearls Ivory Silk Housewife Pillowcase. gingerlily.co.uk

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# ON THE WATER'S EDGE

Our selection of attractive properties currently for sale. This month, perennially popular waterside properties close to rivers, lakes and the sea

## THE APPEAL OF LIQUID ASSETS

Waterside living has been a consistently sought choice for centuries, right from the days of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, whose riverside property in Hampton Court, greater London, was so appealing it was seized by Henry VIII – who promptly remodelled it.

Whilst the practicalities of river transport may have been a drawcard for royalty 500 years ago, today the choice of a property close to water is often much less prosaic. The sound of the sea, an estuary frontage for sailing or a river site that attracts birds and wildlife are each tremendously pleasing and point to the fact that the attractions of a waterfront home are many and varied.

In the property market, this makes them a desirable acquisition, with opportunities to buy them often rare and expensive.

However, there are important factors to consider when living so close to the water. One of these is the danger of flooding. Jonathan Dinnewell of Smallwood Architects says: "Always check the flood records for the area and research what plans the water authorities have for managing the flow of the waterway."

A home with an elevated position is preferable. Dinnewell adds: "When considering the location of the property, buyers would hope to find the approach road leading away from the waterway so that they do not get cut off in a flood. An upper floor will help in extremis!"

Damp is another possibility when surrounded by water, so it is important that potential buyers involve a waterfront property specialist to undertake a survey before investing in a building.

Whilst nature is a drawcard to locations such as rivers and creeks, home owners need to be conscious of the environment, especially when considering renovations. "Ecology is a big issue when working near waterways. Undertaking any work alongside protected wildlife (newts, for example) has onerous conditions," cautions Dinnewell. "Lastly, check that the septic tank is in good order and that there is no danger of polluting the watercourse – you could be fined."










### 1 MOAT INVESTMENT

Old Manor Farm is a former hall house, built in the fifteenth century, located in the hamlet of Broughton. Inside the five-bedroom Grade II listed property are many period details, including exposed beams, a bread oven in the kitchen and a seventeenth-century inglenook fireplace in the dining room. As the house is surrounded by a moat, a wooden bridge gives access to the garden, which is mainly laid to lawn. Go beyond the paddock and you'll find a lovely stream.

*Old Manor Farm, Buckinghamshire, £1.1m, John D Wood*

### 2 IVERSIDE TALES

Gallow Brook has an elevated position on Paxton Hill with extensive frontage to the River Great Ouse. The four-bedroom house, which dates from the 1930s, has many period features, including Crittall doors and windows. There are also open fireplaces in two of the reception rooms, not to mention different aspects of the property's tranquil setting from every window. Over seven acres of extensive gardens feature formal and informal areas.

*Gallow Brook, Cambridgeshire, £895,000, Fine & Country*

### 3 RUN OF THE MILL

From the fully functioning water wheel to the original grinding stones still in working condition, there is no doubt to this eighteenth-century property's former life as a mill. Now a Grade II listed residence, The Watermill's other features include four en suite bedrooms and a charming first floor sitting room with a wood-burning stove. The dining area is glass fronted and leads out to a timber deck on the water.

*The Watermill, Norfolk, £1.975m, Jackson-Stops & Staff*


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## 4 SEASIDE SPLENDOUR

Porthleddon was built as a gentleman's residence in 1909 by Captain John Francis Oats, who made his fortune from the mines in South Africa. Since Oats' time, the house has had many lives, namely as a hotel and evacuee school for girls during the Second World War, but has now been carefully restored to its former glory as a 10-bedroom seaside mansion. The residence's interiors are magnificent, including features such as an Elizabethan drawing room and 38-foot family kitchen.
*Porthledden, Cornwall, £3m, Savills*

## 5 LAKESIDE LODGE

Brunton Lodge is a traditional lakeside villa, constructed in the early 1900s by local builder GH Patterson. This five-bedroom house has an enviable position, located on the eastern shores of Lake Windermere, with views over the water to the fells. The sitting room makes the most of this vista, with wide bay windows and French doors opening out to the sun terrace. Outside, down by the shores, is a wet dock boat house, complete with a day room and balcony.
*Brunton Lodge, Cumbria, £3m, Carter Jonas*

## 6 GONE FISHING

Situated on the River Test between Houghton and Horsebridge, Bossington Mill is a Grade II listed building constructed in the eighteenth century, and remained a working mill until the 1930s. Having been converted into an elegant residence with well-proportioned reception rooms and five to six bedrooms, the property has views of the garden, mill race, and the countryside beyond. Enjoy fly-fishing here as Frederic Halford, 'father' of the sport, once did.
*Bossington Mill, Hampshire, £2.4m, Strutt & Parker*

## 7 DOWN BY THE CREEK

Located at the head of Batson Creek on Salcombe Estuary, Vine House is a fine example of a Georgian waterside property. The sitting room's bay window offers a creek-side vista and French doors leading out to a sunny patio. Meander down to the water's edge through the landscaped gardens, stopping along the way to admire the view from the carefully placed terraces. The property also includes two recently refurbished cottages for additional guest accommodation.
*Vine House, Devon, £3m, Knight Frank* ■

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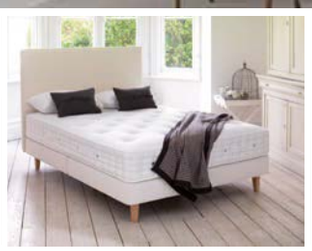

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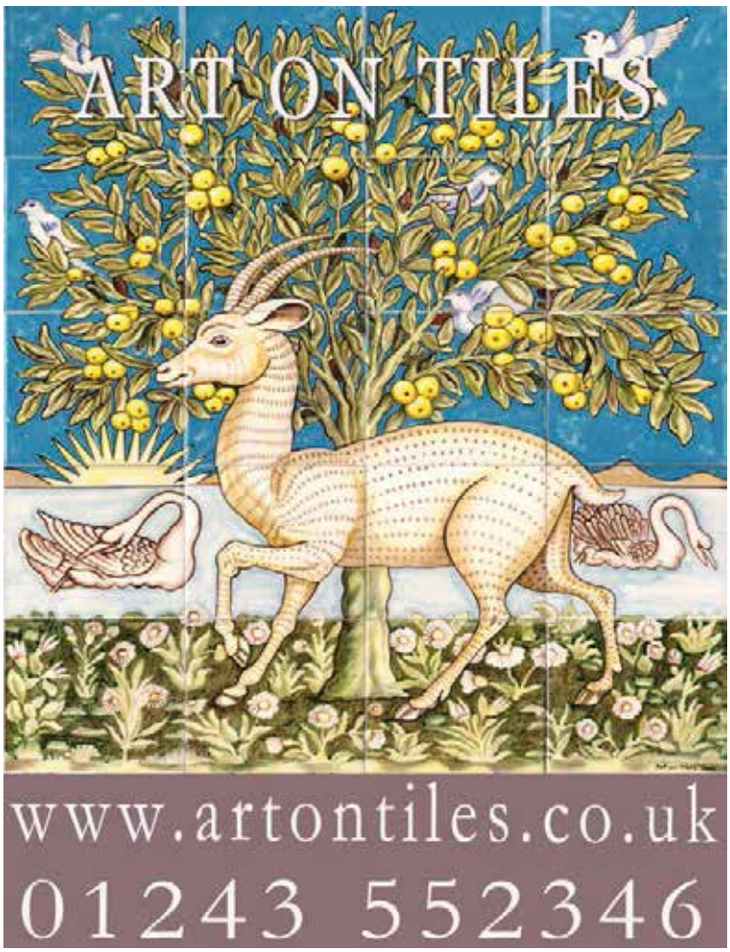


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*Abigail Borg's lively botanic prints create a summery statement suitable for period homes or modern interiors*







# AUTHENTICALLY ENGLISH

**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT** Friti Cushion in slate, £65. Completed drawings are scanned into Photoshop to sharpen the design. Chair in Hello Yarrow, £595, Florrie + Bill. Samples are produced at a Lancashire factory before final approval for digital printing. Curtains in plum Friti Fabric, £75 a metre.

Sitting in traffic on the way to Leeds College of Art caused Abigail Borg to miss a talk on the college's Fine Art course. Instead, she attended a talk on the Printed Textiles degree, which fortuitously led to her taking the course.

After beavering away for several years, Borg unveiled her designs at the graduation show and, to her delight, won the New Designer of the Year Award.

Following her graduation in 2008, and an enjoyable stint at Cath Kidston's commercial studio in London, Borg returned to her hometown of Birmingham and found a wallpaper manufacturer to print her own intricate floral designs. "I've never followed trend forecasting – everything just ends up looking the same otherwise," she reasons.

Guided by her artistic flair, she deftly mixes rich colours with graphic botanic designs. This distinctive style quickly attracted attention at a showcase for new designers, with Liberty becoming the first stockist for her wallpaper in the summer of 2009.

Shortly afterwards, in response to customers' requests, Borg also began designing matching fabric.

Since this inspiring launch platform, as well as an industry award, global stockists have approached Borg, keen to offer her unique prints to clients.

Unassuming, Borg is happiest when drawing the finer details of a flower, which she sketches from photographs of plants within botanical or private gardens. "I can take several days just playing with colours and trying to come up with a palette that I think works with the colour I originally picked."

Capturing her hand-drawn designs with modern technology, Borg welcomes us into her design studio via the virtual realms of Instagram. Success has unwittingly found her through Instagram too, leading to partnerships such as her latest collaboration with vintage chair designer Florrie + Bill. Follow her as exciting projects and new ranges are unveiled. ■

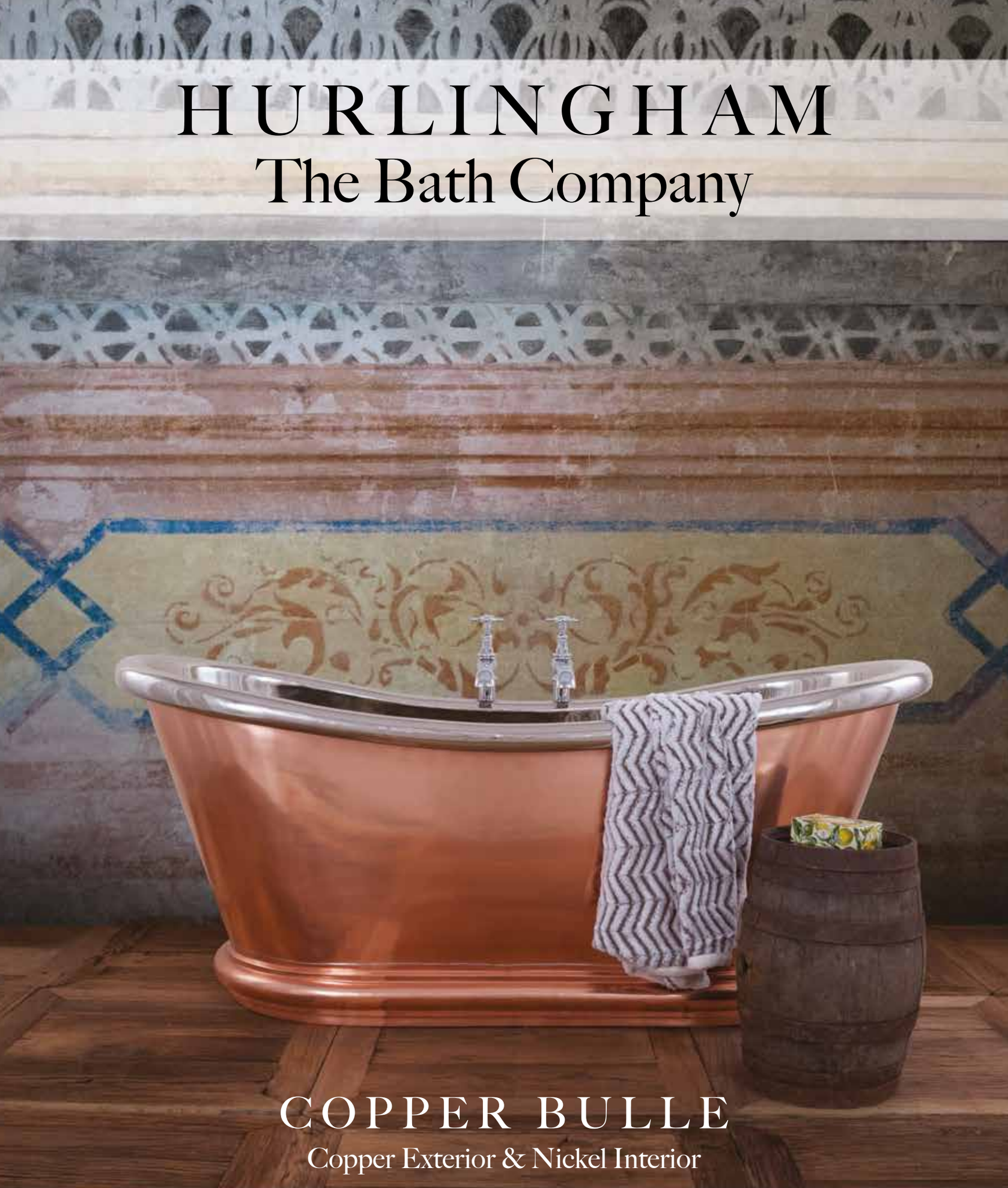




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